DON'T SWITCH TO LINUX...

Until you perform these PC tests

p62

WHY YOU MUST USE AFFINITY PHOTO

It's SO much better than GIMP

p35

BLOCK PHONE ADS!

We've not seen ONE since using this app

page 38

Computer active

ISSUE 726 | 31 DEC 2025 – 13 JAN 2026

Learn something new in every issue

AI's rude awakening – page 49

Ditch Your LAPTOP

Switch to a TABLET in 2026 – they're BIGGER & BETTER than ever! p50

- ☑ Best tablets under £200
- ☑ Best tablets under £500
- ☑ Best pro tablets over £500
- ✚ Android or iPad – which is best?

PLUS YOUR FAVOURITE SOFTWARE REVEALED

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From the Editor

I've developed an odd condition that I've called Monday Morning Swipe. Most weekends my device of choice is an old Samsung tablet, and I must swipe its screen hundreds of times. This seems to retrain my brain so when Monday comes and I turn on my work laptop I instinctively start swiping its screen. Nothing happens, because my laptop doesn't have a touchscreen, but my brain is stuck in weekend mode.

My solution is to buy a new tablet that doubles as a laptop with the aid of a keyboard. Robert Irvine's masterful Cover Feature is the perfect guide, recommending the best models across all prices. I'm torn between sticking with Android (OnePlus Pad 3) or returning to Apple after a five-year break (iPad 11).

Whichever I choose, I'll get more for my money than I would buying a new laptop. Will *anyone* be able to afford a new PC in 2026 (see page 10)?

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

• **PS Our 2025 Back Issue CDs and Sticks are coming soon...**

p35
p62
DON'T SWITCH TO LINUX... Until you perform these PC tests
WHY YOU MUST USE AFFINITY PHOTO It's SO much better than GIMP
Computer active
BLOCK PHONE ADS!
We've not seen ONE since using this app page 38
p38
Ditch Your
LAPTOP
p50
Switch to a TABLET in 2026 – they're BIGGER & BETTER than ever! p50
Best tablets under £200
Best tablets under £500
Best pro tablets over £500
Android or iPad – which is best?
PLUS
YOUR FAVOURITE SOFTWARE REVEALED
Here's what your fellow readers LOVED in 2025 – see p60
p60

THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

4 hours, 30 mins
Average time UK adults spent online every day in 2025 – *p8*

82
Age of one reader who didn't pass Amazon's age check to buy knives – *p13*

£239
Price of Samsung's UE43U8000F smart TV, which wins our Recommended award – *p29*

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

Contents

31 December 2025 – 13 January 2026 • **Issue 726**

6 **News** Govt says "no plans" to axe mid-contract price rises

10 **Question of the Fortnight** Will anyone be able to afford a new PC in 2026?

11 **Protect Your Tech** Amazon refund for 'non-compliant' products

12 **Letters**
Why I fear for the BBC's future

14 **Consumeractive** Do I have to put up with refurbished replacements?

16 **Grow Your Family Tree**
Search British Army Service records

18 **Best Free Software**
Winaero Tweaker 1.64.1

21 **Named & Shamed** Microsoft Edge's sleepy response to security warning

Reviews

22 **Alienware 16X Aurora**
High-performance laptop powers through

23 **Medion Erazer Recon P40**
Budget gaming PC plays within itself

24 **Apple MacBook Pro M5 (14in)**
Flagship laptop trusts the processor

25 **Nothing Phone 3**
Versatile phone calls the shots

26 **Amazon Echo Dot Max**
Spherical speaker is enough to go round

28 **Cherry Xtrfy K33**
Keyboard clicks all the right boxes

70mai Dash Cam 4K T800
Impressive car cam for the road ahead

29 **Samsung UE43U8000F**
Budget smart TV is a screen saver

30 **Buy It/Competition**
Win a Ugreen NASync DH2300 NAS drive

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Workshops & Tips

35 How to... Switch from GIMP to Affinity Photo

38 Block phone ads using AdGuard DNS

40 Readers' Tips Read all ebook formats with ReadEra

42 Browser Tips
Disable all extensions in one click

43 AI Tips
Access voice mode directly in chats

44 Phone and Tablet Tips Switch to Chrome's incognito mode in one tap

46 Make Windows Better Flick through forthcoming Spotlight photos

47 Make Office Better
Import photos in HEIF and HEIC formats

48 In the Club
Use ChatGPT's group chat to collaborate

49 What's All the Fuss About?
Clankers

50 COVER FEATURE Ditch your laptop
Why 2026 could be the year of the tablet and why you should swap your laptop for this more portable alternative

60 Your favourite software of 2025
The 10 most popular programs downloaded by *Computeractive* readers in the past year

62 Check your PC can run Linux
Make sure Linux is compatible with your PC's components via our handy guide

64 Problems Solved
Are there any no-contract SIM cards?

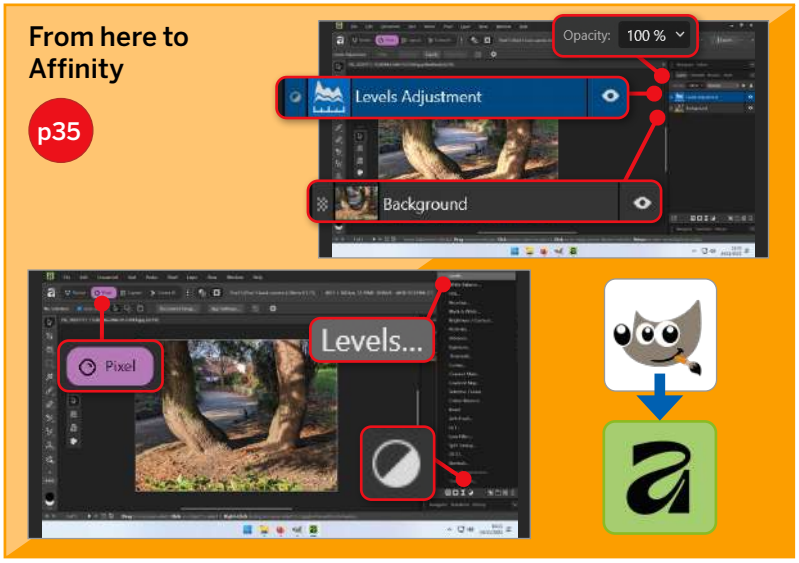
71 Reader Support
Is PDFgear safe to download?

72 Jargon Buster

74 Easy When You Know How
Robert Irvine adds calendar events using AI

From here to Affinity

p35



Ditch Your LAPTOP

COVER FEATURE P50

Switch to a TABLET in 2026 – they're BIGGER & BETTER than ever

- ☑ Best tablets under £200
- ☑ Best tablets under £500
- ☑ Best pro tablets over £500
- ✚ Android or iPad – which is best?

Check your PC can run LINUX

p62

Line up Linux

Govt says “no plans” to axe mid-contract price rises

The Government has said it won’t scrap mid-contract broadband and mobile price rises, despite Technology Secretary Liz Kendall previously telling regulator Ofcom she was “keen” to examine the rules again.

In a debate on mobile and broadband contracts in the House of Lords on 9 December, Minister for Digital Economy, Baroness Lloyd of Effra (pictured right), said there were “no plans” to prevent companies from raising their prices during your contract.

It comes after O2’s decision in October to raise mid-contract price rises by 70p to £2.50 – an increase of 39 per cent.

The size of the increase follows Ofcom’s rule change in early 2025 that prevented broadband and mobile firms from linking price rises to the rate of inflation.

Ofcom said this confused customers and told firms to state price rises in “pounds and pence” instead. But this has led to many companies applying flat price increases each April that as a percentage are much higher than they were under the old rules.

Baroness Lloyd’s statement is likely to anger many customers who have become frustrated by these huge increases. The move will also frustrate consumer campaigners, who want the rules changed.

In November, MoneySavingExpert founder Martin Lewis said O2 was “making a mockery” of Ofcom’s rules and warned that other companies “will feel less worried about following suit”.

Citizens Advice director of policy Tom MacInnes said “the time has come for the regulator to banish mid-contract price rises”.

Ofcom itself said it was “disappointed” by O2’s decision and claimed it “goes against the spirit of our rules, which are designed to ensure greater certainty and transparency for customers when they sign up”.

Baroness Lloyd pointed out that customers “have the right to leave, penalty-free, for 30 days from when unexpected price rises are announced by a provider”.

How much will your phone and broadband bills rise in April 2026? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

WHAT WE THINK

This isn’t strictly a U-turn, but the Government shouldn’t have raised hopes by saying it would ask Ofcom to consider changing its rules. It was probably seeking a positive headline as everyone rushed to criticise O2, but it must have known that another rule change so soon was unlikely. And even if Ofcom acts again, who’s to say it wouldn’t cause a bigger mess? Banning mid-contract rises will have only one effect: more expensive contracts from the start.

UK fines LastPass £1.2m for 2022 data breach

The UK’s data watchdog has fined LastPass £1.2m for a data breach in August 2022 that affected 1.6 million UK users.

The Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) said LastPass “failed to implement sufficiently robust technical and security measures, which ultimately enabled a hacker to gain unauthorised access to its backup database” (www.snipca.com/57454).

It added that there’s “no evidence that hackers were able to unencrypt customer passwords as these are stored locally on customer devices and not by LastPass”.

The breach occurred when a hacker gained access first to the corporate laptop of a LastPass employee based in Europe, and then to a US-based employee’s personal laptop.

The attacker installed malware on the latter and captured the employee’s master password. They used both attacks to access LastPass’ backup database and steal personal information, including customer names, emails and phone numbers.

You’ll like this...
Two nostalgia-themed Freeview channels have returned (www.snipca.com/57456)

but not this...
‘Unremovable’ Copilot app is coming to some TVs (www.snipca.com/57453)

Amazon removes tool that lets you install banned apps

Amazon has removed a tool from its app store that allows you to install banned apps on its Fire TV Stick.

The company has a list of blocked apps that it prevents you from installing, but App Cloner lets you clone and rename apps so Amazon can't detect them.

App Cloner was built as a way of running multiple editions of the same app with different settings, such as two versions of a messaging service logged into different accounts.

Clone Your Apps.
Multiply Your Possibilities.
Run multiple instances of your favorite Fire TV apps. Sign into different accounts, keep data separate, and switch between them instantly.
Download APK
Downloader: 6332051

But many people have used it recently to bypass Amazon's tougher stance on apps it says are breaking its policies.

This is part of a wider crackdown on apps that let users watch paid-for content for free on their Fire TV Sticks. Amazon's new Fire TV Stick 4K Select, for example, prevents the sideloading of apps, even though there are plenty of legal reasons for doing this (see our 'What we think' box).

Lots of users have criticised this move, with many giving the new device just a one-star review on Amazon (www.snipca.com/57436).

App Cloner's developers say Amazon told them the app was removed because it violated its terms of service.

However, it remains available on the developers' website (https://app-cloner.com, pictured above), from where you can download it on Android phones and tablets as well as on Fire TV Sticks.

WHAT WE THINK

Amazon's crackdown on illegal streaming is becoming unhinged and unfair. It has allowed App Cloner for years, and it serves a perfectly valid purpose. Google allows plenty of similar apps on its Play Store (www.snipca.com/57437). And there are many legitimate reasons for sideloading apps on to TV sticks that don't involve watching Premier League football for free. We'll explain all these in our next issue – out on Wednesday 14 January.

Block kids from using VPNs, say Lords

A cross-party group of peers in the House of Lords has tabled an amendment to the Online Safety Act that would ban children in the UK from using VPNs.

If passed, the Government would have to enforce the restrictions within 12 months.

It comes in response to the huge rise in people using VPNs to beat age checks on porn sites, which were introduced in July.

Under the proposals VPN providers would be forced to verify the age of all UK users, using "highly effective" age-checking methods to make sure no one using the service is under 18.

It would apply to any VPN that markets itself to users in the UK or is used by a "significant number" of people in the country.

In their explanatory note, the peers wrote that the clause would require the Government to "take action to promote and protect children's wellbeing" and to further support child-protective measures in the Online Safety Act.

The Government would also have to create a system for monitoring VPNs and penalising those that break the law.

To become law, the amendment will have to be voted through both the Lords and the House of Commons.

Should children be banned from using VPNs? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

£227 MINI PC CAN WORK AS A NAS DRIVE

Chinese manufacturer YouYeeToo has released a mini PC with four SSD slots and two 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports, effectively making it work as a NAS drive too. Each slot on the NestDisk (pictured above) is M.2 PCIe 3.0 and lets you fit a 1TB SSD, bringing overall storage to 4TB. It's available on Amazon for £227 (www.snipca.com/57438).

EE BECOMES FIRST ISP TO OFFER Wi-Fi 7 TO ALL

EE has become the first broadband provider to offer Wi-Fi 7 across all its plans. For speeds up to 1Gbps customers will get EE's Smart Hub 7 Plus router and the optional WiFi Extender 7 Plus. Customers on 1.6Gbps broadband will get the tri-band Smart Hub 7 Pro. For details and prices visit www.snipca.com/57431.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

In Issue 724 we tittered at Russia's robot Aldol collapsing on stage (www.snipca.com/57163). Now it's the turn of Tesla's Optimus to have a very public malfunction. At an art fair in Miami it knocked over several water bottles, then threw its hands up and toppled backwards (www.snipca.com/57439). What a clanker (see page 49)!

IN BRIEF

MOTO TAG 2 TRACKER SET FOR RELEASE

Motorola looks set to release the second version of its Moto Tag Bluetooth tracker, according to leaks reported by the website Android Headlines. It's available in green and orange (pictured below), though price and release date haven't been announced. The original Moto Tag is still on sale for £19.35 (www.snipca.com/57415).

Credit Android Headlines

THREE CLOSES FINAL 3G MOBILE SITES

Mobile network Three has confirmed it switched off all its 3G sites at the end of November. It said some of these defunct services can be reused to boost its 4G and 5G signals (see www.snipca.com/57393). Every major network has agreed to phase out 2G and 3G by 2033.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

You've heard of the wrong type of leaves cancelling trains. Well, now AI gets the blame. Network Rail scrapped some services after seeing the image right apparently showing damage to Carlisle Bridge in Lancaster. It was posted online following a small earthquake in the north west.

Credit BBC/Network Rail

Most Brits don't feel free to air their views online

Only 35 per cent of people think they can share their opinions online as freely as offline, according to Ofcom's latest study into the UK's internet habits.

The Online Nation survey (www.snipca.com/57401), which was conducted in May, also saw a sharp fall in the proportion of adults who think the internet is good for society – down from 40 to 33 per cent.

There's a fall too in the proportion who think the benefits of being online outweighs the risks – from 71 per cent two years ago to 65 per cent in 2025.

On average, though, adults are spending 10 minutes longer online than in 2024, at four and a half hours a day. Women spend 26 minutes a day longer online than men, at 4 hours 43 minutes.

Only five per cent of the adult population don't have access to the internet at home. This rises to 20 per cent of the over-75s.

Most time online is spent on a smartphone (men 75 per cent; women 79 per cent). Men are more likely than women to go online using a PC.

Half of all time online is spent on services owned by Alphabet (Google, YouTube) and Meta (Facebook, WhatsApp). YouTube is watched regularly by 94 per cent of adults, with viewing on non-TV devices increasing to 51 minutes a day.

Use of ChatGPT shot up in 2025. It had 1.8 billion UK visits in the first eight months of 2025, up from 368 million in the same period in 2024.

Are you worried about sharing opinions online? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Apple and Google make it easier to switch between iOS and Android

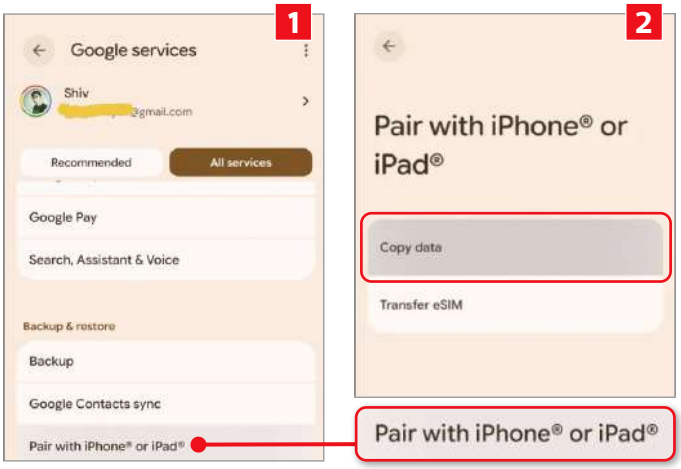
Apple and Google are working together to make it easier to switch between Android phones and iPhones.

A feature in the latest Canary build of Android simplifies the process of moving your data as you set up an Android device or iPhone/iPad.

Canary builds are preview versions of Android that Google makes available to developers and more adventurous users.

If Canary features work as desired they typically appear in Android betas before being added to the full operating system.

The new option appears when you tap 'Pair with iPhone or iPad' (see screenshot 1) followed by 'Copy data' 2.



Credit Android Authority

Currently, the easiest way to switch between Android and iOS is to use either Apple's 'Move to iOS' app (www.snipca.com/57397) or Google's Android Switch (www.snipca.com/57398).

However, these methods are far from perfect, with users known to have lost photos and messages during the switch. They can also take a long time.

Freely TV box back in stock with new 12-month free offer

The first Freely TV box, Netgem's PLEIO, is back in stock after selling out and now gives you 12 months' free access to more than 250 online games and over 150 extra channels.

When PLEIO launched in November you only got three months free before deciding whether to pay £9.99 a month to continue the subscription.

It also contains all the normal Freely channels and radio stations without a subscription. These include the channels you also get on Freeview and Freesat, such as BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 as well as U&Dave and U&Yesterday (see the full list at www.snipca.com/57419).

Because it runs Google's Android TV operating system you can install TV-streaming apps from the Play Store, including for Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV, Disney+ and Paramount+ – though you'll need to subscribe separately to each.

The PLEIO pack comprises a puck (pictured above 1), remote control 2 and a Bluetooth gaming controller 3. It costs £99 from Amazon (www.snipca.com/57226). We awarded it four stars in Issue 725 (page 28).

TiVo FREELY BOXES COMING IN 2026

You may soon have a much wider choice of Freely boxes to buy after TiVo announced that any manufacturer can now use its operating system on their models. It follows Everyone TV, which runs Freely, granting permission for TiVo to work with the service.

TiVo made its name with TV-recording boxes but is now primarily an operating system for smart TVs. It already provides the system for Freely on TVs made by Sharp, Bush and Panasonic. Read more at www.snipca.com/57420.

Amazon Alexa now automatically buys items when prices fall

Amazon's smart speakers can now automatically buy items for you when the price falls to an amount you set – though only in the US for now.

It works through Alexa+, the latest version of Amazon's voice-activated assistant, and only on the Echo Show 15 and 21 devices, which have screens.

Amazon launched Alexa+ earlier this year, claiming it's better at holding more "expansive and natural" conversations (see www.snipca.com/57422).

However, Alexa+ is only available in the US at the moment and Amazon hasn't said when it will come to the UK. Amazon has already added the auto-buy feature to its Rufus chatbot, but again only in the US.

The AI-powered chatbot can perform other tasks in the UK though, including tracking the price of an item over the past 30 or 90 days. (see Issue 725, page 44).

Both the Echo Show 15 and 21 are on sale in the UK, priced £300 and £400 respectively (www.snipca.com/57427, pictured) and www.snipca.com/57428).

Alexa+ should also come eventually to the Echo Dot Max, reviewed on page 26.

Would you feel comfortable letting Alexa automatically buy items for you? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

UPDATE NOTEPAD++ TO AVOID MALWARE

The developers of Notepad++, a more advanced alternative to Windows Notepad, have released an emergency update after the previous version was infected with malware. To get it, visit www.snipca.com/57418 then scroll down to the 'Download Notepad++ x64' heading and click the green Download button (pictured below).

SKY STOPS SELLING Q TV ONLINE

Sky has stopped selling its Q TV set-top box (pictured below) online. Visit Sky Q's website (www.snipca.com/57417) and you'll see a message encouraging you to subscribe to Sky Stream instead for £15 a month. However, the page does include a phone number where you can talk to Sky about Q (03337 595262) and link to high-street stores where you can still buy it.

1PMOBILE OFFERS eSIMs TO CUSTOMERS

1pMobile is now offering eSIMs to customers. The MVNO, which piggybacks on EE's network, says setting up an eSIM takes just three steps, including scanning a QR code (see www.snipca.com/57414). However, existing customers have to pay a £2.50 fee to move from a physical SIM card.

Will anyone be able to afford a new PC in 2026?

Soaring memory costs are causing huge price increases

When even the makers of Raspberry Pi are warning about big price rises you know times are tough.

Their mission is to make computing affordable for all, but in early December they said that due to the "unprecedented rise" in the cost of PC memory they're increasing the price of Raspberry Pi 4 and 5 products.

They blamed competition from tech giants wanting high-performance DRAM (Dynamic Random-Access Memory, pictured below) for their vast data centres, which they need to power their increasingly ambitious AI projects. This has seen prices rise around 170 per cent since 2024, and more than double since the summer.

At the other end of the scale Lenovo, the world's biggest PC manufacturer, also called the rise in memory prices "unprecedented". It has started stockpiling memory so it has enough to keep going throughout 2026 without paying over the odds.

HP has also been stockpiling and says it has enough memory to last until May, but after that prices will rise. In addition it plans to change its product range to make more computers that require less memory. They predict that sales of cheaper machines will fall sharpest because people with less money are more sensitive to price rises.

THE FACTS

- CyberPower, Dell, Lenovo and Raspberry Pi have all warned that PC prices will rise considerably in 2026
- They blamed the rising cost in computer memory driven by demand from AI companies to power their data centres
- CyberPower and Raspberry Pi said they'll cut prices when market conditions change

The highest figure we've seen quoted for the rise in memory costs came from CyberPower in November, when it claimed prices had soared by 500 per cent, on top of SSD prices doubling.

In November, it warned customers on X (www.snipca.com/57467) of "price adjustments on all systems" starting 7 December.

Dell too is raising prices – by up to 30 per cent – though for now the pain will be felt most by businesses according to an internal memo to staff, leaked to the website Business Insider.

So, how much will computers now cost? CyberPower has given the clearest indication, saying systems with a 1TB SSD and 16GB of RAM will cost $80 more (about £60), while a 2TB SSD and 32GB of RAM will cost $160 (£120).

Raspberry Pi has already raised prices (see www.snipca.com/57469), with the biggest jump being 21 per cent for the 16GB Pi 5 – rising from $120 (about £89) to $145 (£108).

Other manufacturers haven't been as transparent, but industry analysts expect prices to rise by at least 15 to 20 per cent, while premium and gaming PCs could increase by up to 50 per cent.

Raspberry Pi does offer a glimmer of hope, saying the price rises are "painful but ultimately temporary". It said it remains "committed to driving down the cost of computing" and indicated it will cut prices once competition subsides.

CyberPower also claimed that prices will "adjust back accordingly when market conditions change".

But neither company said what might cause market conditions to change, nor how likely it is.

We can't see the tech giants abandoning their AI aspirations any time soon, so it seems just as likely that these price rises will be baked in.

It's possible of course that the long-feared bursting of the AI bubble will finally come to pass, leading to a stock-market crash and maybe a global recession.

That might bring PC prices down – or at least stabilise them – but would anyone have any money left anyway?

Not all price rises have been applied yet, so if you need a new computer the sooner you buy it the better. You may also find better refurbished models, as online sellers respond to greater demand from customers who can no longer afford to buy brand new.

Tech giants need DRAM to power AI projects, increasing demand and forcing up prices

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

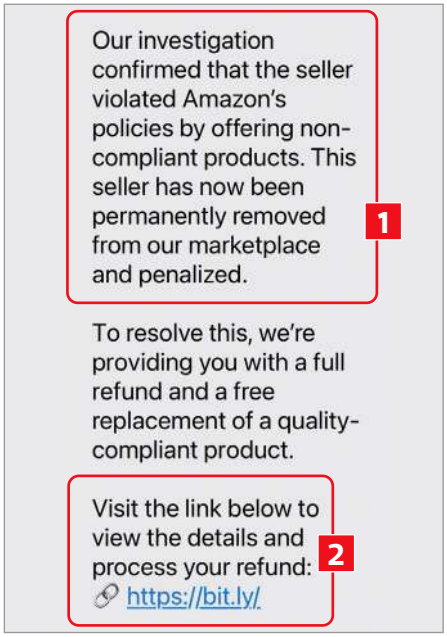
Amazon refund for 'non-compliant' products

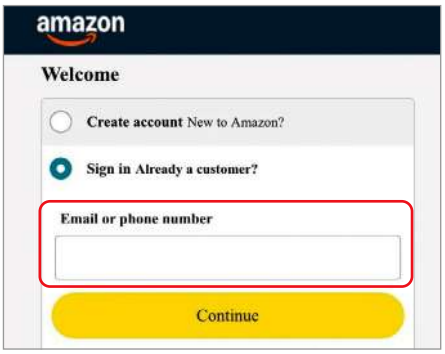
What's the threat?

Scammers are sending text messages that claim to be from Amazon saying you've been refunded because a seller broke its rules.

The text begins: "Our investigation confirmed that the seller violated Amazon's policies by offering non-compliant products" (1 in our screenshot right). It adds that the seller has been "permanently removed" from Amazon's Marketplace.

It also says all you need to do to receive a "full refund and a free replacement" is to click a link. The link is provided as a bit.ly 2, which is a shortened URL that redirects to a longer one. Clicking the link takes you to a fake Amazon web page where you're asked to sign in and enter your email address or phone number (see screenshot far right).


Our investigation confirmed that the seller violated Amazon's policies by offering non-compliant products. This seller has now been permanently removed from our marketplace and penalized.
1
To resolve this, we're providing you with a full refund and a free replacement of a quality-compliant product.
Visit the link below to view the details and process your refund:
2
https://bit.ly/



Credit: Which?

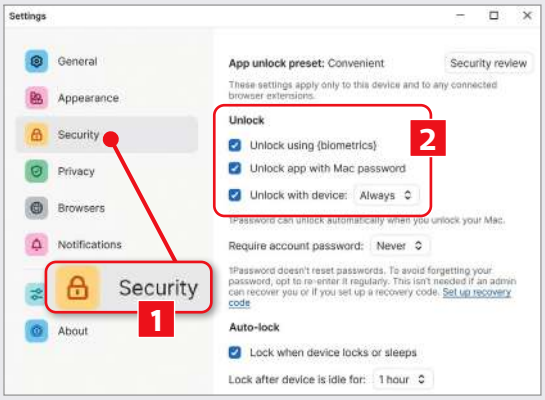
How can you stay safe?

Amazon will never text you about "non-compliant" products you've bought. Instead, it will send an email to your registered Amazon address – check what this is by clicking 'Accounts & Lists' at the top right of Amazon's home page then 'Login & Security'. You can also see these emails by clicking Your Messages.

Also, if Amazon decides that a product breaks its policy it will refund you automatically through your payment method, confirming by email. Visit Amazon's help pages for more common scams (www.snipca.com/57307) and check which products it bans at www.snipca.com/57309.

New tools | Automatically unlock 1Password when you sign in

Forget your master password and you'll be permanently locked out of your password vault, but that doesn't mean you should be forced to type it every time you want to use a password manager. 1Password agrees and has added a setting that automatically unlocks your account when you sign into your device (Android, iPhone, Mac or Windows).



It works with all methods of signing in, including passwords and biometrics such as fingerprint, facial recognition and PIN. To turn it on, launch 1Password then click Security on the left (1 in our screenshot) and then on the right choose how you want it to automatically unlock 2. You can ask for a recovery code in case you lose your device.

Read 1Password's blog (www.snipca.com/57310) to learn more about how this feature works, and also how it has improved alerts in its browser extension (www.snipca.com/57311).

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

Morrison's 'Family treat box'

In Issue 724's 'Named & Shamed' you nominated Meta as your fortnightly villain for admitting they make a fortune from scam adverts. Well, a day after reading that I saw a Facebook ad for a Morrison's 'Family treat box' that cost just £10 for people aged over 40. I'm more than double that, so it caught my eye, but the link you were meant to click was a shortened URL from Tinyurl. That was clearly fake. The message in the ad was ridiculous, claiming 'My daughter works at Morrison's and told me about this amazing offer'. What tosh! Still, it probably made Meta a few bob.

Colin Draper

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

If Amazon allows sideloading, £20 for new Stick is a bargain

I completely agree with your two-star verdict on Amazon's new Fire TV Stick 4K Select (Issue 725, page 29, pictured right). Banning sideloading is the proverbial sledgehammer to crack a nut. It stigmatises all those people who sideload apps for legal purposes, not to watch Premier League football without paying.

But might Amazon backtrack on this stupid decision? It's already done so to allow VPNs (Issue 725, page 7). If you think it will, then the current price of just £19.99 for the device (www.snipca.com/57247), down from £49.99, could prove to be a bargain. I might take a punt.

Jim Howard

CA SAYS **We understand Jim's reasoning, but we doubt Amazon will reverse its ban on sideloading. This was a deliberate policy decision to control what can run on its Fire TV devices. By stopping users from installing apps outside the official store, Amazon reduces the risk of malware, copyright infringement and dodgy apps slipping on to millions of devices.**

The VPN reversal, by contrast, was a relatively minor tweak: it involved formally supporting apps that already exist and comply with Amazon's rules. It was technically very easy and doesn't represent a major policy U-turn.

Customers fined for missing appointments will simply lie

I agree in principle with Matthew Potts, who says there's nothing wrong with charging customers for missing broadband appointments (Star Letter, Issue 725). But the problem is that customers will simply claim they had to deal with a personal emergency and refuse to pay, or threaten to take the company to its ombudsman.

I'm sure most missed appointments are just when people forget, but there's nothing to stop them saying they had to rush an elderly relative to hospital and so couldn't stay in to answer the door. How could a broadband company possibly disprove this? Indeed, why would it even bother trying? It wouldn't want the bad publicity of fining a customer who was faced with such a crisis.

Arthur Goodall

Reassuring that Openreach failed to close copper exchanges

You say it's an "ominous" sign that Openreach failed to close two copper phone exchanges before its deadline (Issue 725, page 6). I take the opposite view. Surely it's reassuring that Openreach is double-checking that no vulnerable customers will be left behind. It's better to be overcautious and postpone the closing of an exchange than forge ahead and risk hundreds of telecare users being cut off.

I speak from personal experience. My elderly mother has a telecare system and she's been contacted several times to switch to digital. But we've yet to be convinced that the replacement service will work at all times, especially during power cuts. There must be thousands of people in a similar predicament around the UK.

Robert McCormack

Don't blame retailers for your own mistakes

You do a great job of standing up for customers' rights in Consumeractive every issue, and much of the time it's clear that the retailer (often Currys!) is in the wrong. But I think you should also point out when the customer is being unreasonable. This came to mind when reading John McDonald's case in Issue 725 (page 15). He complained that the retailer he bought from didn't give him enough time to cancel before despatching the item.

This hit a nerve because I run a small online business, and we aim to post items within several hours. This is our priority because I know customers would be much more annoyed by late deliveries than not having enough time to cancel. I think John's anger at the retailer should have been directed more at himself. I understand he was annoyed at forgetting he was going on holiday, but that wasn't the retailer's fault.

Joyce Morrison

Please Microsoft, let me speak to a human!

I have four Windows 10 computers. I was able to enrol for extended updates for two of them, but I had forgotten the passwords for the other two. I've tried a number of times to get a new password and filled in the necessary

What's the Issue...?

When did you publish a How To on using a Raspberry Pi and an SD card to make a NAS drive?

Keith Bonds

CA SAYS **In Issue 710, page 38 – buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/57280.**

CA SAYS **In Issue 716, page 35 – buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/57279.**

I've just installed the Windows-tweaking software Windhawk and need to read your Workshop on it. When was that issue?

Warren Miller

I seem to recall you comparing USB sticks from Lexar, Netac and SanDisk. Is that right?

CA SAYS **Yes, in Issue 696's Cover Feature on external hard drives (page 56). Read it on our 2024 Back Issue USB Stick: www.snipca.com/53180.**

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If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk

forms, but I was repeatedly told I hadn't provided enough information.

Finally, I decided to phone Microsoft for help. But each number I rang I was told to speak to a robot. On one of the calls I was told to type 'aka.ms.sus' into my browser. I then got chatting to someone who said they would put me through to an expert. A page opened and I was asked to input my debit-card details as the support would cost me just £1 which would be refunded later. At this point I was suspicious. So I asked in another browser whether this was correct and Google AI informed me it was most likely a scam.

Why does a tech company as large as Microsoft, which makes millions, not have a call centre where you can immediately talk to a human?

Elvin Rose MBE

AI makes staff work harder because they fear being replaced

I don't doubt David Williams' experiences with AI taking jobs (Letters, Issue 725), but things are different in the company I run. We have a small team of 50 and hope to expand soon. When the AI hype started a few years ago I thought it would inevitably lead to some roles being made redundant, but the exact opposite has happened. We've simply shoved as much boring and automated work on to AI as possible, allowing us to focus on more productive and profitable tasks.

Perhaps we've just been lucky, because the advent of AI has coincided with a period of growth for us. In tougher times maybe AI would have led to cost-cutting, but it hasn't happened yet. The other positive thing about AI is that it motivates workers to up their game, because they fear they might be replaced. Or again, perhaps I've been lucky?

Tony Davis

The rise of AI will affect the *type* of jobs available, but I don't agree with David Williams that it'll lead to "millions of people" being made redundant. A much bigger factor will be Government policy. Companies and workers respond to the right incentives to work. Get that right and AI might lead to *more* job opportunities, not less.

Gary Malthouse

STAR LETTER

Why I fear for the BBC's future

The BBC has been around for 20 years longer than I have and I would hate to see it close down, but I fear for its future after reading Issue 725's 'Question of the Fortnight' (pictured). I had no idea that three million people dodge paying the licence fee, while even more declare they no longer watch live TV – though how does the BBC know the latter group are telling the truth?

I also had no idea that when I confirm I have a licence fee when signing into the iPlayer, the BBC doesn't actually check whether this is true. I assumed it used some complicated system to verify this. What's the point of this message if it doesn't mean anything?

MPs who urge the BBC to modernise are right. In an age of Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, there's no point in the BBC sticking to its public-service remit of wanting to be available to everyone. Can you imagine Netflix's shareholders tolerating a situation where it couldn't block people who didn't pay? It also doesn't make any sense. If the BBC has paid for more officers to bang on doors to catch fee dodgers, why is it so reluctant to use iPlayer data to do the same?

Question of the Fortnight

Should the BBC use iPlayer to catch licence-fee dodgers?

MPs want it to find a better system than knocking on front doors

Got a TV Licence?

THE FACTS

BBC iPLAYER

If the BBC doesn't seem especially bothered about catching fee dodgers, then it's hardly surprising so many people think they can avoid paying it. I'll continue to do so, but for the first time in my life it occurred to me that perhaps I shouldn't.

Scott Bradley

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

I'm 82, so why can't I buy knives on Amazon?

I must have spent several thousand pounds on Amazon over the years. I turn 82 soon and recently tried to order a set of kitchen knives. However when going through the checkout I was asked for verification of my age. I entered my details but Amazon refused the purchase because they couldn't verify me (pictured below).

I emailed Amazon's customer service with no joy, so then rang them. They assured me that within 24 hours I'd be able to make my purchase but I made three more attempts to no avail. I asked my 50-year-old son, who's also a regular Amazon customer, to make the purchase for me, but he also hit the same brick wall. What on earth is going on at Amazon?

Geoffrey Boow

Verify your age

Date of birth

January 20 1943

Sorry, we couldn't verify your age. You can only buy age restricted items from Amazon if you pass the age verification. Please check your entries and try again, or remove the age restricted items from your cart. If the verification still fails, it's possible that Experian couldn't find a match in their databases

Proof of age and a signature will be required on delivery.

CA SAYS This isn't anything you or your son have done wrong. Amazon uses an automated age check when you buy kitchen knives, and that system sometimes goes wrong. It checks your date of birth against external databases from credit agencies such as Experian. If it can't match the details quickly enough, it simply blocks the order. Customer service can't override the automated check.

Some customers have said on Amazon's forums that the solution is to edit how your name appears in your credit-card details at the checkout process (see www.snipca.com/57400). Read more about Amazon's age-verification rules at www.snipca.com/57410.

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Do I have to put up with refurbished replacements?

LEAD CASE

Q In 2022, I bought a TP-Link TL-PA8010P powerline adapter kit (pictured) for our office room at the end of the garden. It worked well for a year but failed in 2023 due to there being no power on the house-based unit. I contacted TP-Link and – because it was within the three-year warranty – was given a replacement. This has also now failed. I realised the replacement was a refurbished unit. Do I have a case because I was given a refurbished unit, rather than a new one, and because my three-year warranty wasn't extended?

Andrew Edwards

A Andrew does have a case, but it's against the retailer not TP-Link (assuming they're not the same). A warranty only covers the original purchase. It doesn't automatically reset when the manufacturer supplies a replacement, whether it's a new model or refurbished.

Andrew should therefore tell the retailer that the Powerline no longer works and ask for help. It might refund him, though it would be allowed to deduct some money to reflect how long he used it before it broke. It's also allowed to offer a repair or replacement, but only one of these. If a repair or replacement fails, the retailer must refund him.

A retailer is allowed to supply a refurbished replacement from six months to one year after purchase. Like brand new goods these are covered by the Consumer Rights Act, so they must be "fit for purpose", "as described" and of "satisfactory quality". However, the law does take into account that refurbished goods may not last as long as new items.

Andrew's biggest problem might be persuading the retailer that the powerline is inherently faulty. He would need to prove this because six months have passed since purchase.

CASE ONGOING

Are eBay rights different to Amazon Renewed?

Q I recently bought a Fitbit Versa 4 fitness watch from an individual eBay seller and a laptop from a company on Amazon Renewed (www.snipca.com/57263). Do I have any rights in the event of any problems?

Gillian Wills

A Yes and no. Gillian will be covered by the Consumer Rights Act (CRA) for the Amazon purchase because she would have bought from a company. If anything goes wrong, she should contact the seller citing the CRA and seek help through the Amazon Renewed Guarantee (www.snipca.com/57271), which might prove quicker.

As for the eBay purchase, she'll be covered only if the seller is a sole trader or acting in the course of business. If it's an individual seller who's not registered commercially, Gillian would have to rely on eBay's Money Back Guarantee (www.snipca.com/57270). EBay gives you 30 days to make a claim if the item is faulty or not as described. Unfortunately, once this period has passed, there's very little scope for seeking help.

CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATE

Tesco refunds reader after admitting excuse was wrong

We're pleased to report that Tesco has refunded reader Malcolm Lee the £24 he spent on an IMO Dash phone (www.snipca.com/57196, pictured) that kept shutting down and failing to hold a charge (see Issue 725).

Malcolm had a clear case against Tesco. He bought the phone in September and the problems began soon after. However, when he went to a Tesco store to return it, he was told the 30-day deadline to seek help had passed, and that his purchase wasn't covered by its extended Christmas returns period which allows returns until the end of January 2026 for purchases made between 1 October and 24 December (www.snipca.com/57197).

This ranks among the worst customer advice we've ever dealt with. First, shoppers have six years (five in Scotland) to seek redress for a faulty item. It's true that more than 30 days had passed since purchase, but that simply meant Tesco had the right to inspect the phone before issuing a refund or repairing/replacing it. Second, this law trumps any extended returns period offered by a retailer. In short, Tesco had to help Malcolm.

Tesco admitted to us that Malcolm received incorrect advice and has apologised to him. Perhaps embarrassed by the episode, it agreed to refund him rather than inspect the phone first.

Evri lost my eBay purchase – what should I do?

Q I ordered a case for my Samsung Galaxy Z Flip6 phone from eBay in September. This was allegedly delivered by Evri in the first week of October – but nothing has arrived. I reported this to eBay, but it refused to help because Evri claims it delivered the case. Since then, I've secured proof from Evri acknowledging that it lost the package. What should I do now?

Chris Ward

A Chris doesn't have a contract with Evri, so he needs to contact the eBay seller for help. He should send proof from Evri that it lost the item, and ask the seller for a refund or replacement. If the seller refuses, he could threaten to report them to eBay or trading standards, or even take them to the small claims court – though it's probably not worth it for such a small purchase.

He should also raise the case again with eBay, sending Evri's acknowledgement to its Money Back Guarantee (www.snipca.com/57270). However, eBay only offers help for 30 days after purchase.

If this deadline has passed, Chris should seek a refund through his

payment method. If he paid by PayPal he has 180 days to open a dispute (www.snipca.com/57273). If he paid through his bank account he can ask it for a chargeback.

CASE ONGOING

How can CCL blame me for losing a returned laptop?

Q In March 2023, I bought two Acer Extensa laptops from CCL computers (www.cclonline.com) in Bradford. The hinge has broken on one of the laptops, exposing the screen's connections to the keyboard. I told CCL, who then sent me prepaid DPD packaging to send it back. I did this in August and the tracking information says it arrived, but CCL told me it can't locate the laptop and now won't respond to my emails. What should I do next?

Brian Yewdall

A Brian should send a strongly worded email to CCL explaining that in providing a prepaid label for returning the laptop it became responsible for its safe arrival. It's not Brian's fault if it's gone missing because he doesn't have a contract with DPD. Instead, CCL must contact the courier and seek compensation.

CCL was within its rights to ask Brian to return the laptop for inspection, but it shouldn't be ignoring his requests for help. We'll ask the company what's happening, and remind it that Brian can't be held liable if the laptop has gone missing. He would have been responsible only if he'd paid for the return himself.

If CCL can't locate the laptop, it must offer a replacement that's acceptable to him or refund him. CCL can deduct some money from any refund to reflect the time he used it.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Humax has helped with remotes, Freesat and subtitles

I enjoyed your review of the PLEIO Freely box in Issue 725 (page 28), but I'm going to wait for Humax to release its Freely recorder. I've had plenty of positive experiences with the company in the past and it gives me confidence that they'll fix any issues I might have with the recorder.

The company is especially good at sending replacement remote controls quickly. I've needed two in the past five years and they both arrived within 48 hours. Going back to the 2010s, I had a Humax Freesat box that I sometimes struggled to operate. Humax's advice was excellent every time.

A couple of months ago, I sought help for a neighbour who's deaf. I asked Humax to send her instructions for turning on subtitles and they emailed these almost straight away. All this paints a picture of a company that treats customers with respect.

Darren Miles

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Humax

- **Email** uksupport@humaxonline.co.uk
- **Online form** www.snipca.com/57274
- **Phone** 0344 318 8800

Grow Your Family Tree

If your ancestors fought in World War 2, you'll like Ancestry's newly digitised collection. Follow **Richard Holt's** advice to...

Search British Army Service records

In October 2024, Ancestry released the first batch of World War 2 service records for the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (www.snipca.com/57165). In November 2025, it added 106,000 new infantry records to its existing 'UK, Military Service Records, 1939–1959' collection, covering non-commissioned officers and other ranks (officers are not included).

These records let you trace your ancestors' movements during their service and reveal details such as the medals they earned. They're part of a wider, ongoing project to digitise Ministry of Defence records and make them available online, though for legal reasons only records for people born more than 100 years ago can be accessed. The collection will continue to grow as more documents are digitised and transferred to the National Archives.

Explore Ancestry's new records

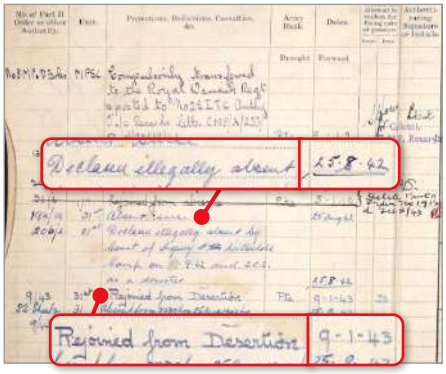
To explore the new Military Service Records, visit www.snipca.com/57166 then enter a name and as many fields as possible. There are several relating to physical description including height, weight, complexion, and hair and eye colour.

I searched using the surname Wingrove and the place of residence as High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, which gave me 17 results, including for my great-great-uncle Ernest Harold Wingrove. The table of contents told me there were 24 images and provided links to different documents, including his Attestation (created when signing up), Tracer Card (recording a soldier's movements) and Record of Service.

Ernest Wingrove's Attestation shows his service number and the regiments he served in

Wingrove's Attestation revealed his service number (5379955, 1 in our screenshot above), his date of birth (22 July 1908 2), and that he served in both the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and the Royal Warwickshire Regiment 3. It also named his parents as Walter Jesse and Minnie Maria Wingrove 4.

The records also told me that Ernest was far from the model soldier. He was found guilty of neglecting to supervise two soldiers under sentence at the military detention barracks in Dundee, and then deserted from 25 August 1942 until 9 January 1943 (see screenshot above). He was held at Chorley Detention Barracks for 84 days following his trial.



Ernest Wingrove deserted from the army from August 1942 to January 1943

Check the National Archive's WO 422 catalogue

You can also search the original WO 422 records at the National Archives via their Discovery catalogue (www.snipca.com/57167) using your ancestor's surname, date of birth, or service number. These are the same records Ancestry has digitised, but the catalogue only confirms whether a record exists – you'll still need to view the document in person or online via Ancestry to see the full images. I noticed Ernest's record was incorrectly indexed as 'E. Wingrave' rather than 'E. H. Wingrove', and so suggested a correction (www.snipca.com/57168).

Your **Genealogy** Problems Solved

I read somewhere that you can read the diaries of soldiers who fought at Gallipoli during World War 1. Is that true? I have several ancestors who fought there – most of whom sadly died. I don't know if they kept diaries, but I'd like to check.

David McGee

It's not the diaries of individual soldiers you can read, but those kept by military units to record operations, movements, casualties and more. You should search in Ancestry's 'UK, World War I War Diaries (Gallipoli and Dardanelles), 1914–1916' collection (www.snipca.com/57147). Enter as much information as possible, including regiment and unit name if you know them.

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Seek help on the RootsChat forums

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at your side

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Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

SYSTEM TOOL

Winaero Tweaker 1.64.1

www.snipca.com/57399
What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

Winaero Tweaker was once our go-to tool for fixing Windows annoyances, but it's been nearly 18 months since the last version. As a surprise Christmas present, the developer released a major update in December with an improved design and host of useful new tweaks.

The program finally has a dark mode that matches your Windows theme preference, reducing eye strain when you're tweaking your PC later in the day. This is complemented by the new ability to enlarge Winaero Tweaker's font size. The developer says some users found the default font too small, so he's added the much-requested option to 'drastically increase' the text size. Click the Tools menu, select Settings and drag the 'Font scaling' slider to your preferred size.

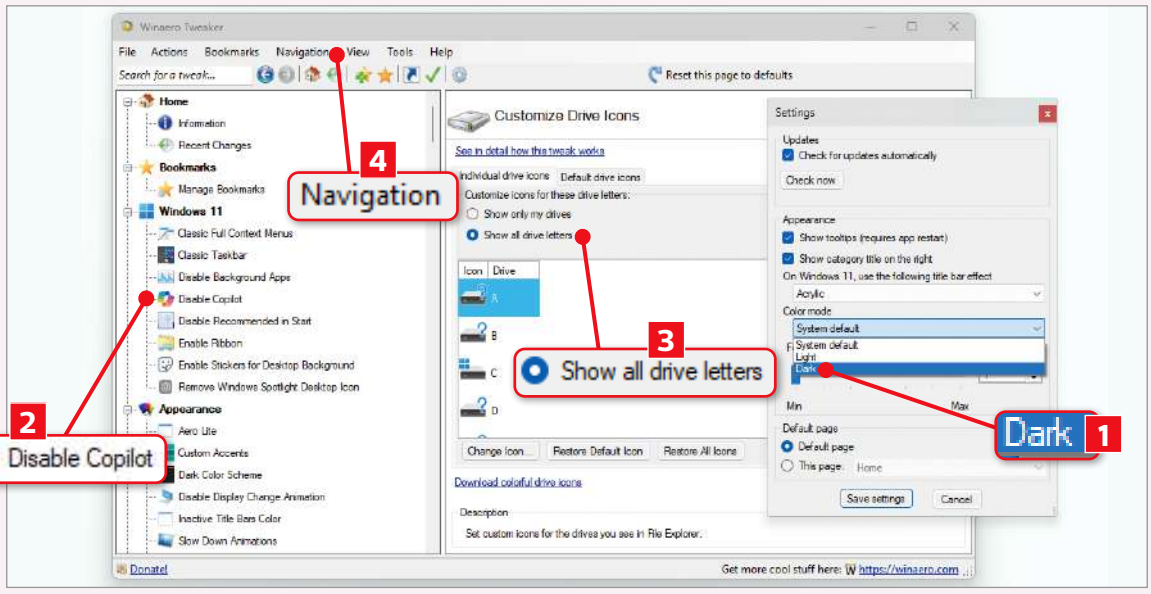
Some of the new tweaks are exclusive to Windows 11. Winaero Tweaker automatically detects which version of the operating system you're using to display relevant settings.

These include removing the Recommended section from Windows 11's Start menu. Select 'Disable Recommended in Start' in the list of Windows 11 settings and tick 'Disable Recommended Section in Start menu' – you'll need to reboot your PC for the change to take effect. Note that this tweak may stop Windows Spotlight working.

Another new option removes the Ask Copilot entry from the right-click menu. In the Context menu section, select Remove Default Entries, scroll to the bottom of the list and tick the Ask Copilot box. You can also remove other unwanted entries such as 'Open in Windows Terminal' and 'Edit in Clipchamp'.

One of the most interesting new options changes the icons of drives in File Explorer. Click 'Customize Drive Icons' in the File Explorer section, select a drive then click Change Icon. Choose the icon you want to use and click OK. To undo the change, click Restore Drive Icon or Restore All Icons.

Winaero Tweaker triggers a SmartScreen warning, but it's safe to install, so just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.



1 To apply Winaero Tweaker's new dark mode, click the Tools menu and select Settings. Click the 'Color mode' dropdown menu and choose Dark – or 'System default' if Windows' system-wide dark theme is enabled.

2 Winaero Tweaker lets you disable Copilot in Windows 11 if you never use Microsoft's AI assistant. Select 'Disable Copilot' in the Windows 11 section then tick the Disable Copilot box. You'll need to restart your computer.

3 As well as changing the icons for your PC's built-in hard drives, you can assign custom designs to removable drives. Select 'Show all drive letters' on the Customize Drive Icons screen to review the options.

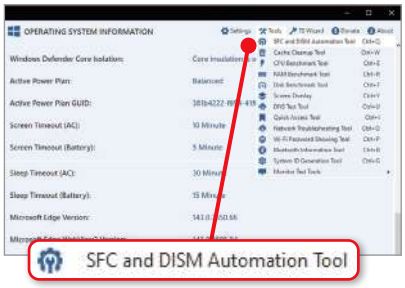
4 Winaero Tweaker lists tweaks you've recently viewed in its Navigation menu. This makes them easy to access when you need to undo any changes. Select 'Recent changes' to see all the tweaks you've applied.

SYSTEM-INFORMATION TOOL

Glow 25.16

www.snipca.com/56896

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



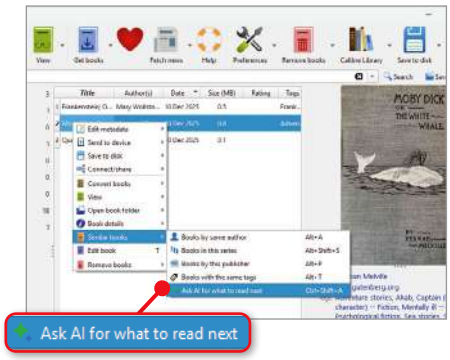
Glow has made some welcome performance improvements and added yet more useful information about your system. It now requires less processing power and runs almost as fast on Windows 11 PCs as it does on Windows 10. The Operating System section now includes details of your PC's power plan and how long your screen and system will take to go into sleep mode when your laptop is running on mains or battery power. Glow has also added support for screen readers, so you can hear its information read aloud, and improved its 'SFC and DISM Automation Tool' (see screenshot) to show the progress of scans and repairs. Glow still triggers a SmartScreen warning, but just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'. Turn to page 60 to see if Glow made your top 10 programs of 2025 – it topped the list in 2024.

EBOOK MANAGER

Calibre 8.16.2

www.snipca.com/57402

What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux



Calibre has new AI features that let you ask questions about ebooks in your library and get recommendations for books to read next. Select an ebook then click the arrow next to the View button and choose 'Discuss selected ebook(s) with AI'. You'll need to set up an AI provider – the simplest option is GoogleAI (Gemini), for which you can get a free API key from Google AI Studio. Create a new project and copy the API key details into Calibre. Once this is done, type a question, click Send and Gemini will respond with a helpful answer. For AI-powered reading recommendations, right-click a book in your library and choose 'Similar books' then 'Ask AI for what to read next' (see screenshot). You can easily ignore these AI tools if you don't want to use them.

SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

TunnelBear Unlimited

www.tunnelbear.com

Price: $48 (£43.20) a year or $9.99 (£9) per month

Free trial: Limited free plan

What you need: Windows 10 or 11, or macOSx

With its simple design and cute bear animations, TunnelBear has long been the friendliest VPN around. Although its free plan gives you only 2GB of data a month, it lets you connect to servers in the US, Canada and Australia. Sadly, at the beginning of December TunnelBear changed its free plan to get users to upgrade to an Unlimited subscription. It says this will help it cover the costs of maintaining its service, without resorting to ads and collecting user data (www.snipca.com/57404).

You can no longer choose which free server you connect to, but instead are assigned the fastest available (see screenshot). This is similar to the free version of Proton VPN, but in our tests TunnelBear kept connecting us to a UK server – not much use for beating geo-restrictions and age checks. Equally frustrating is that you now need to pay for split tunnelling, which lets you choose which apps are protected by the VPN. Again, that's the case with Proton VPN's free plan, but Proton gives you unlimited monthly data.

At the time of writing, an annual TunnelBear Unlimited subscription was discounted to $48 (£43.20 inc VAT) a year – it usually costs $60 (£54). That's much cheaper than NordVPN and ExpressVPN, and even undercuts Proton VPN Plus. It includes unlimited data and devices, and 8,000 servers in 47 countries, but lacks the advanced features you get from those services.

OUR VERDICT: Pay for it (with caveats)

You now have to pay for TunnelBear's Unlimited plan if you want to choose your VPN server and use split tunnelling. However, other paid-for VPNs offer a wider choice of countries, faster speeds and extra security tools.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

Which calendar offers pop-up reminders?

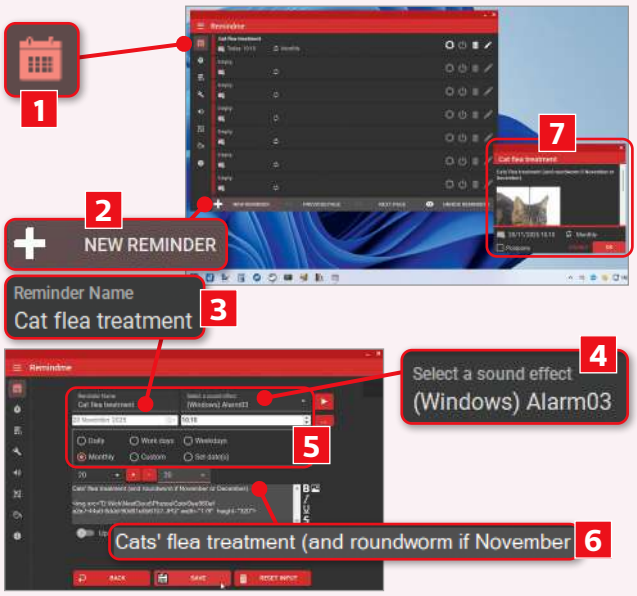
Q I've been using Outlook for many years, but I now want to move away from Microsoft products. I often use its calendar, and I like how items appear in a pop-up reminder window. Is there another calendar that does the same thing?

David Cross

A If you're looking to replace Outlook entirely, we recommend the email client Thunderbird (www.thunderbird.net), which has a calendar and shows pop-up reminders. The calendar appears in the main window next to your email – simply click New Event to create your item, then be sure to set a reminder when filling in the event details to receive a pop-up reminder.

If all you need is an app for simple task-based reminders rather than a full-blown calendar, try RemindMe instead. Visit www.snipca.com/57164, then click the small 'Raw' button at the top right.

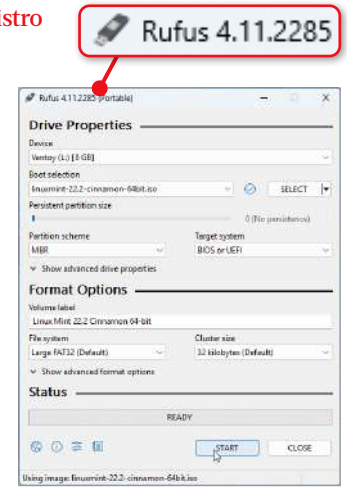
Once launched, click its taskbar icon (1 in our screenshots below) then click New Reminder 2. Now give it a name 3 and choose a sound effect 4. You also need to set a schedule 5. Add an optional description 6 to show in the reminder (including images), then click Save. When the reminder is triggered, it'll appear in a window on your screen 7, with options to postpone or disable it.



What do I need to run Linux from a USB stick?

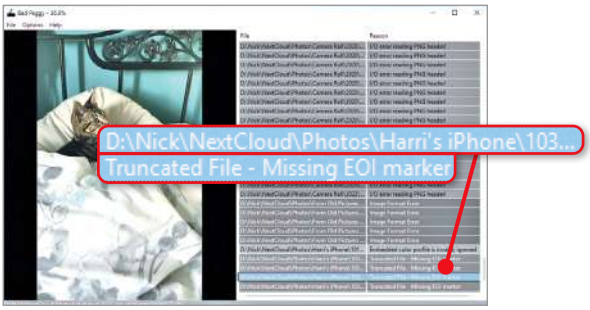
Q I want to try a Linux distro but don't want to lose Windows 10 as my main operating system. Is it possible to run a version of Linux from a USB stick? If so, what software do I need and how large should the stick be?

Terry Steels



A Yes, it is – you can run Linux on any USB stick. We recommend 128GB or 256GB to leave plenty of room for more apps. You'll also need another USB stick (as small as 8GB) and a program called Rufus (https://rufus.ie, pictured) to copy the Linux ISO file to it – we explain how to use it in Issue 693 (page 51).

Can I produce a report on the integrity of my image files?



Q I need to check the integrity of my image files without opening them,to see whether the header and all other data is present. Can any program process a batch of files and list their integrity in a report?

John Lindley

A The program Bad Peggy does this. Go to www.snipca.com/57162, scroll down to the bottom of the page and click the green Download Your File link. Extract the file that downloads then double-click the 'install.vbs' file. Once launched, click File then Scan to select any folder containing images. Any that fail Bad Peggy's verification checks will be listed along with an explanation of why they failed (see screenshot).

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

SOFTWARE WARNING!

Microsoft Edge's sleepy response to security warning

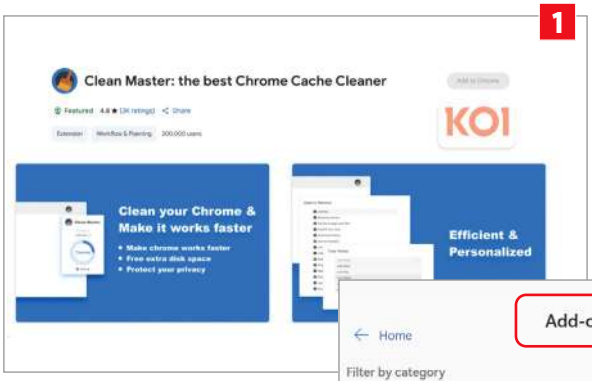
Both Google and Microsoft claim to use advanced protection to block dodgy apps, but recent evidence would suggest otherwise.

In November, it was revealed that Google had allowed 239 malicious apps on its Play Store between June 2024 and May 2025 (see Issue 723, page 10). These had been downloaded 42 million times. And now we discover that Microsoft allowed five dodgy browser extensions to stay on its Edge add-ons store despite being warned about them.

That's the claim from Israeli security firm Koi, which in a blog post (www.snipca.com/57354) on 1 December warned about the Chinese hackers ShadyPanda, who have spent the past seven years infecting more than 4.3 million people with malicious extensions – on Chrome (see screenshot 1) as well as Edge.

Koi told us that five of the extensions were still on the Edge store when it wrote the blog post, despite informing Microsoft about them before publishing it. This must have embarrassed Microsoft because it quickly removed all extensions from Starlab Technology – one of the dodgy developers exposed by Koi. Our screenshot 2 shows the page should list three Starlab extensions, but it's completely blank.

Now, we're not sure exactly when Koi warned Microsoft about the apps but it claims they first appeared on the Edge store in 2023. I can't shake the suspicion that, like so many tech giants before them, Microsoft only acted once they had been publicly shamed.



1 **Clean Master was one of several dodgy extensions Google allowed on its Chrome Web Store**

2 **Microsoft drew a blank for Starlab add-ons, but only after security experts warned them**

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Google boss Sundar Pichai

www.snipca.com/57288

"Every generation of Gemini has built on the last, enabling you to do more. Gemini 1's breakthroughs in native multimodality and long context window expanded the kinds of information that could be processed – and how much of it. Gemini 2 laid the foundation for agentic capabilities and pushed the frontiers on reasoning and thinking, helping with more complex tasks and ideas."

WHAT THEY MEAN

My jargon also pushes the frontiers on reasoning and thinking, but I'm the boss so everyone pretends to understand it.

KEUMARS' VILLAINS OF THE FORTNIGHT

White van conmen

Back in June 2020, while most people were checking they had enough loo roll to see them through the next Covid lockdown, these three were busy advertising vans online.

Liam Cumbor (32), Patrick Stokes (36) and Michael Stokes (31) – pictured from left to right – told buyers to pay into bank accounts. Nothing unusual about that, except the accounts were owned by people they had recruited to act as 'money mules' through a social-media account called 'Michael Cashman' (nothing to do with the former *EastEnders* actor).

They then accompanied these mules to their bank and told them to withdraw the money. The trio kept this scam going until 2023, conning over 300 people, until they were caught by South Yorkshire Police. They're each now serving two-and-a-half years behind bars.

Credit: South Yorkshire Police

LAPTOP | **£1,799** from Dell www.snipca.com/57396

Alienware 16X Aurora

Next level

Alienware doesn't deal in cheap laptops, but the Aurora range makes Dell's prestige gaming brand a little more affordable. The designs are as eye-catching and robust as ever, with the 16X Aurora reviewed here wrapped in a refined aluminium chassis finished in a deep blue 'Interstellar Indigo' colour, with a luminous Alienware logo on the lid (pictured below).

There's no shortage of connectivity options, with two USB-A ports, Ethernet and HDMI 2.1 ports, a fast USB-C port (with 10Gbps transfer speeds), and an even faster Thunderbolt 4 port. It's big and heavy, like most high-performance gaming laptops, but also great for everyday use.

> "Screen gets bright enough to make photos, videos and games look fantastic"

Unlike more expensive Alienware models, the keyboard only has a single RGB lighting zone, so you can't set up different colours for different areas. The travel is slightly soft and shallow, but the layout works well, with three customisable macro keys for games or apps in the function row at the top.

The touchpad is smooth and responsive, so you won't need a mouse for everyday use. With Wi-Fi 7 built in, decent stereo speakers and a 1080p webcam with Windows Hello face recognition for sign-in and video calls, you have a machine that can go beyond gaming to cover all your other laptop needs.

The Aurora has a 16in screen with a 2560x1600-pixel resolution and a 240Hz refresh rate for smooth scrolling and ultra-fast frame rates in games. Colour accuracy is impressive – it covers 100 per cent of the DCI-P3 gamut as well as 100 per cent of sRGB – and it gets bright enough at 500cd/m² to make photos, videos and games look fantastic. That said, the slightly grey blacks spoil the contrast overall, especially in darker scenes.

Alienware has designed this laptop to maximise performance and keep its high-spec components cool. Our test model came with Intel's Core Ultra 9 275HX – a 24-core monster processor – and one of Nvidia's powerful RTX 5070 graphics cards. Thankfully, the laptop didn't throttle its performance to avoid overheating even when we ran it in its Overdrive performance mode.

In tests we could hit frame rates of over 100fps in several demanding games without any upscaling, and even higher frame rates should be possible with DLSS 4 and frame generation turned on.

We could also run games at Ultra settings with raytracing effects – something you can't do on lower-spec gaming machines. The fans get pretty loud, but at least it's a consistent drone, and it's fairly quiet when running popular Windows programs.

Battery life isn't brilliant, managing around five hours of video playback on the Balanced power setting in our tests. However, you can squeeze out more time by enabling Stealth Mode, which disables the keyboard lighting, limits performance and silences the fans.

With prices starting at £1,419 for a model with a Core Ultra 7 255HX chip and RTX 5060 graphics, the 16X Aurora is good value. What's more, Alienware's basic version, the 16 Aurora, starts at just £799. The 16X is worth the extra money, thanks to faster components and a superior screen, but credit to Alienware for widening its audience without compromising on quality or speed.

SPECIFICATIONS

24-core Intel Core Ultra 9 275HX processor • 32GB RAM • Nvidia RTX 5070 graphics card • 16in 2560x1600-pixel 240Hz IPS screen • 1TB SSD • 2x USB 3.2 Gen 1 ports • 1x USB-C port • 1x Thunderbolt 4 port • 1x HDMI port • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • 1x Gigabit Ethernet port • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 5.4 • Windows 11 Home • 23x357x265mm (HxWxD) • 2.61Kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/57396

VERDICT Expensive, but this is a premium gaming laptop that can just about do everything you might need

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Acer Nitro V15 £899

If your budget stops at £1,000, this laptop gives you strong specs and great gaming performance

DESKTOP PC | **£899** from Currys www.snipca.com/57374

Medion Erazer Recon P40

Fair game

This desktop PC from German manufacturer Medion provides solid performance levels and all you need for 1080p gaming for well under £1,000. It's surprisingly energy-efficient for a gaming system, using just 65 Watts (W) when idle and a mere 259W at peak. That's nearer to the demands of a console than your average PC. It's also surprisingly quiet, with none of the usual sudden increases in volume when you start running more demanding programs or games.

> "A budget PC that balances price and gaming prowess"

There's no option to turn off the RGB lighting on its three fans (two front, one rear), but you can set them to white and stick to a solid colour if you don't want disco lighting below your desk. Oddly, instead of configuring the lights with software, you have to cycle through the colours and options by poking a paperclip into a hole next to the power button.

You'll need a screwdriver to remove the tempered glass panel on the left-hand side (pictured left), and once you do you'll find your upgrade options fairly limited. Both DDR4 RAM slots are already occupied, leaving one spare M.2 slot for a second SSD.

SPECIFICATIONS

10-core Intel Core i5 14400 processor • 16GB RAM • 8GB Nvidia RTX 5050 8GB graphics • 1TB SSD • 4x USB 3.0 ports • 2x USB 2.0 ports • 2x USB-C ports • 1x HDMI 2.1 port • 3x DisplayPort 2.1 ports • Gigabit Ethernet port • 3x 3.5mm audio jacks • 650W power supply • Windows 11 Home • 360x170x340mm (HxWxD) • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/57374

Still, there's Bluetooth support built in plus an Ethernet port at the rear, along with two USB 3.2, one USB-C and two USB 2.0 ports. A further two USB 3.2, one USB-C port and a 3.5mm headphone jack are within easy reach at the front (pictured above).

The Recon P40 balances price and gaming prowess by using Nvidia's basic RTX 5050 graphics processor. It's not staggeringly fast, but it's powerful enough to run demanding games at high settings on a Full HD screen, and it also gives you Nvidia's latest DLSS4 upscaling tech.

In tests, we found you could run graphically complex games at 1080p with maximum settings and frame rates of over 90fps. If you use raytracing effects that drops down to around 55fps, but even that's very playable and you can boost its capabilities with DLSS.

What's more, the Recon P40's Core i5 14400 processor scored respectable figures in our rendering benchmark tests, so this machine can handle graphic and editing work as well as play.

This is a perfectly adequate budget gaming PC, but it feels slightly overpriced for what you get, particularly when Medion sells almost the same PC with the faster RTX 5060 graphics card for only £100 more (www.snipca.com/57395). Alternatively, a custom-built PC would give you significantly more upgrade potential for just a little extra money.

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *T3* and *What Hi-Fi*, and the websites Tom's Hardware (www.tomshardware.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT A decent budget gaming PC, but spending a little more will get you a faster machine with better upgrade potential

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Dell Tower Plus EBT2250 From £849 This flexible mini tower can be configured into almost any PC you might need

LAPTOP | **£1,599** from Amazon www.snipca.com/57363

Apple MacBook Pro M5 (14in)

Mint chip

Computer active
RECOMMENDED
SMART
SM
Garages for Safe Cyclists.
Hi everyone, we're super thrilled to update you on how our business has evolved since we last met and explain the opportunity at hand.

Apple's MacBook Pro remains the benchmark laptop for creative users, even if little except for the processor has changed since the M3 model. This year it's back with Apple's new M5 chip, but the core design remains much the same.

This isn't necessarily cause to grumble. It's a well-built and attractive laptop, especially in the stylish Space Black finish. At 22mm thick and weighing 1.6kg, it's light and portable for such a powerful device.

The keyboard is excellent, and the trackpad large, smooth and responsive. Like last year's model, it has three Thunderbolt 4/USB 4.0 ports with speeds of up to 40Gb/s, plus an HDMI port for connecting to a 4K screen. The only disappointment is that it still has Wi-Fi 6E when comparable Windows laptops have moved to Wi-FI 7.

> "It's an absolute powerhouse for demanding image- or video-editing work"

The notorious Apple premium is still in place. If you want more RAM than the basic 16GB, you'll need to add £200 for 24GB or £400 for 32GB. Likewise, if the 512GB SSD is not big enough, you'll need an extra £200 for a 1TB drive and £600 for a 2TB SSD. Still, you get the same brilliant mini-LED display on every specification, with a 3024x1964-pixel resolution for an incredibly sharp and detailed picture. It covers 82 per cent of the DCI-P3 colour gamut used in HDR content, and colours are lifelike and exceptionally vivid.

It's also very bright, reaching 574cd/m² when working on the desktop and 1,542cd/m² when you're watching or editing HDR content. An optional nano-texture coating, yours for an extra £150, reduces reflections and glare from the screen, and could be a wise investment if often you use your laptop under bright lighting or outside.

The biggest selling point here, however, is the aforementioned M5 chip. With four high-performance cores and six high-efficiency cores, it promises to be 20-per-cent faster than the old M4 processor, along with more memory to shift data quickly between the CPU and RAM. Apple has also enhanced the 10-core graphics processor to speed up 3D graphics rendering, while also improving the chip's neural engines to make it faster in AI tasks.

These upgrades seem to have worked. The M5 performed noticeably faster than the old M4 in our benchmark tests, while also beating laptops based on the AMD Ryzen 9 AI HX370 and the Intel Core 9 Ultra 288V – two of the speediest laptop processors around.

When playing games or showing 3D graphics it can't beat laptops that have dedicated GPUs. But it's an absolute powerhouse for demanding image- or video-editing work, not to mention AI processing. Many of us aren't too worried about running AI chatbots on our laptop, but the MacBook Pro is still up to the task. It's also great for using the AI features built into Adobe Photoshop and Premiere Pro.

Impressively, it can do this demanding work even when it's not plugged in – and its performance level is barely impacted. In fact, the MacBook Pro has plenty of stamina, lasting two or more working days on a single charge, and surviving for just over 18 hours in our battery tests. While it's not an essential update for MacBook Pro M3 and M4 users, the new Pro is a brilliant all-rounder. You may even consider it good value if you stick to the basic spec.

SPECIFICATIONS

10-core Apple M5 processor • 16GB to 32GB RAM • 10-core M5 GPU • 14.2in 3024x1964-pixel 120Hz Mini-LED screen • 512GB to 4TB SSD • 3x Thunderbolt 4/USB 4.0 ports • 1x HDMI port • 1x SDXC memory card slot • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • WiFi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • MacOS 26 Tahoe • 15.5x313x221mm (HxWxD) • 1.6Kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/57363

VERDICT A superb high-performance laptop with fantastic battery life and a gorgeous mini-LED screen

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

MSI Prestige A16 AI+ £1,299 This potent Windows 16in laptop beats the MacBook Pro on some specs and costs less

SMARTPHONE | **£899** from Amazon www.snipca.com/57317

Nothing Phone 3

Much ado about something

Having made its name with distinctive mid-range smartphones, UK firm Nothing has now moved upmarket with the Phone 3. Some will love its industrial style, with its semi-transparent back, protruding camera lenses and illuminated dot-matrix display in the top-right corner, but others may find it ugly. Even though it's much the same size as the OnePlus 15 (see Issue 725, page 24) and only 1mm thicker, it still feels chunky in the hand.

> "Provides photos with eye-catching quality and superb close-up detail"

You can customise the tiny matrix display on the rear to show a stopwatch or the current battery level, or even to play a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors. Meanwhile, a new side button – the Essential key – can capture screenshots or video with a single press, ready to be sent to Nothing's Essential Space: an AI tool that can analyse any stored images, notes and voice recordings. It's just a shame that it can be so easily confused with a power button.

The Phone 3's 6.67in screen is fantastic, with a crisp 2800x1260-pixel resolution, a 120Hz refresh rate for incredibly smooth scrolling, and a palette of 10 billion colours. Combine that with a 4500cd/m² maximum brightness level and this phone is usable even in the brightest sunlight, while photos and videos look vibrant and punchy.

The camera setup is equally impressive, giving you a choice of three 50-megapixel units, including one with a 114-degree wide angle and one with a 3x periscope zoom. Pictures look great across all three, but the periscope camera adds eye-catching quality to photos, plus superb close-up detail in Macro mode.

The Phone 3's Snapdragon 8s Gen 4 processor isn't as fast as the Snapdragon Elite Gen 5 chip in the OnePlus 15, scoring lower in our benchmark tests, but the Phone 3 still runs like a high-end smartphone, and handles advanced Android games smoothly with high graphics settings.

The 5150mAh battery will easily get you through a full day of use, though you won't want to risk a second day without a recharge. Still, with 65W wired and 15W wireless charging, it's a very easy phone to top up.

This is a superb phone for the money, and recent deals have seen some big discounts. Yet while the Phone 3 gives you a premium camera, screen and specs, they just fall short of high-end rivals from OnePlus, Samsung and Google.

SPECIFICATIONS:
Octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 8s Gen 4 processor • 12-16GB RAM • 6.67in 2800x1260-pixel AMOLED touchscreen • 256-512GB storage • 50-megapixel rear main camera • 50-megapixel rear telephoto camera • 50-megapixel rear ultrawide camera • 50-megapixel front camera • IP68 ingress protection • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 6.0 • Nothing OS 4 based on Android 16 • 161x76x9mm (HxWxD) • 218g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/57317

VERDICT Nothing's first high-end phone gets most things right, but can't quite match the specifications of similarly priced rivals

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE
OnePlus 15 £879 A superb smartphone with incredible performance, long battery life and a brilliant screen

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Chiclet keyboards

What are they?

Low-profile keyboards with flat, spaced-out keys that look like small square plastic tiles. The design is almost ubiquitous on modern laptops and have also become popular for standalone keyboards.

How do they work?

Early chiclet keyboards worked much like the old membrane keyboards, with the keys sitting on top of a rubber sheet with rubber domes and the electronic switches for each key underneath. Depressing the sheet pushes down the dome, activating the key switch.

However, most current chiclet keyboards use a scissor-switch mechanism, where the key sits on top of two U-shaped plastic arms that interlock on each side like the blades on a pair of scissors. Both arms depress when you press the key down, then bounce back up when the key is released.

What are the specs?

Unlike mechanical keyboards, where users will often wax lyrical about their favourite switch types, we don't tend to know much about chiclet keyboards except the travel (how far you need to depress the key before it actuates); the technology used to mark symbols on the keys; and data about how many presses each key could take in testing without showing signs of failure.

Even travel is down to personal preference. Some find a long travel (2mm or more) more comfortable, while others feel a shorter travel (1mm to 1.5mm) helps them type faster. The symbols on laser-etched keys will usually last longer than on cheaper printed keycaps.

Can I change it later?

Not without ditching the whole keyboard – or laptop – so read reviews and, where possible, try before you buy.

SMART SPEAKER | **£100** from Amazon www.snipca.com/57318

Amazon Echo Dot Max

Fully rounded

After 11 years and several redesigns, the Amazon Echo has been replaced by a super-sized Echo Dot. Still roughly spherical with one chunk of the sphere lopped off to form the base, the Echo Dot Max is 109mm in diameter, and so only slightly larger than the existing 100mm Dot. But where the Dot incorporates a single 11.73in front-firing speaker, the Max features a 2.5in subwoofer and a 0.8in tweeter to deliver room-filling sound. An inset panel on the front gives you playback, volume and mute controls, and is surrounded by a glowing LED ring to provide status feedback.

> "It looks and sounds better than previous Echo speakers"

Cleverly, it analyses the acoustics of the room (size, shape, furniture and surface reflections) and adjusts the audio so it sounds balanced and clear. In fact, when compared with Apple's HomePod Mini, we found the Max was louder and offered more bass. However, some vocals sound more constrained and less upfront in the mix than they do on Apple's speaker.

Still, the Max packs in many more features. You can combine new light, presence and temperature sensors with the built-in Zigbee and Matter to control your smart-home gadgets. For example, you can set your smart thermostat to kick in when the temperature drops and you're in the room, or have the lighting turn on when you enter. The sensors work fast, so you won't be fumbling in the dark.

You can also connect multiple Max speakers to a Fire TV Stick for stereo or multi-channel surround-sound, while each one can connect to Amazon's Eero Mesh Wi-Fi system and act as a Wi-Fi 6 mesh extender, supporting up to 10 devices at speeds of up to 100Mbps.

Most importantly, the Echo Dot Max supports all the usual functions of Amazon's Alexa voice assistant, and will be one of the first devices to support the AI-powered Alexa+ technology once it launches in the UK.

The Echo Dot Max isn't a must-have upgrade – and it can't match the enhanced audio quality of the new Echo Studio. Yet it looks and sounds better than the 4th Generation Echo, and makes a more powerful hub for your smart home.

SPECIFICATIONS

Amazon AZ3 processor • 2.5in subwoofer • 0.8in full-range speaker • Wi-Fi 6E • Zigbee, Matter and Thread support • Ambient temperature sensor • Presence-detection sensor • Eero mesh extender • 88x109x109mm (HxWxD) • 505g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/57318

VERDICT A worthy replacement for the classic Echo speaker, packing a big sound and powerful features into an even smaller unit

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Amazon Echo Studio £220 Similar features, but it offers much more powerful and immersive spatial audio

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

How can I switch my mouse and keyboard between two PCs?

Q I've bought a new Windows 11 PC but I'm still using some old apps and storing 30,000+ photos on my old Windows 10 machine. I have a monitor with an HDMI splitter and this works well, but to avoid having two mice and two keyboards, I'm connecting them through a six-port hub and moving the cable from one PC to the other. Is there a switch that does the same job for USB that the HDMI splitter does for the monitor?

Jack Woods

A Some USB switches do this, such as this Ugreen model (£29 from www.snipca.com/57322, pictured) with three USB-A port and one USB-C that will switch between two PCs at the click of a button. It also comes with a simple wired remote you can stick on your desk.

However, a KVM (Keyboard Video Mouse) switch might be better. This switches your whole desktop setup, including mouse, keyboard and monitor, and even external hard drives and printers, between two PCs at a click of a single button.

This CMSTEDCD model (£30 from www.snipca.com/53486) supports 4K monitors at 60Hz refresh rates and has four USB 3.0 ports. It even comes with all the cables you'll need.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Transform your conservatory in just one day

UK MADE

BUY NOW PAY LATER FINANCE AVAILABLE*

10 YEAR PANEL GUARANTEE

SAVE ££'S ENERGY EFFICIENT

2 FREE PANELS
*QUOTE CA1125

Is your conservatory TOO HOT in summer and TOO COLD in winter?

WARMER IN WINTER

"There is no doubt the conservatory is much warmer, and not darker either!"

David Birch, Chichester

TRANSFORMED CONSERVATORY

"We're so proud of our transformed conservatory that we have recommended Green Space to many of our friends and relatives."

Mr and Mrs Davies Somerset

COOLER IN SUMMER

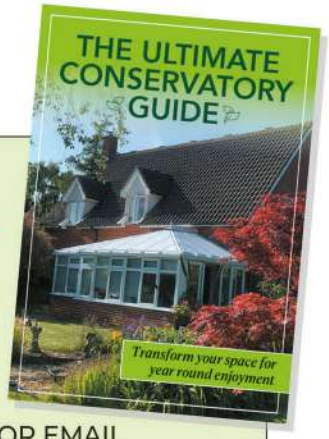
"You could have fried an egg on the table in there in the summer, I now look upon the conservatory as a new room. It is quiet, restful and cosy."

Carol Doyle, Surrey

REDUCES ENERGY BILLS

"I've already turned the underfloor heating down. Lovely job guys, thank you!"

Anne Bird, Bristol



FREE GUIDE

Understand the potential of your conservatory and add value to your home!

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and get your FREE GUIDE sent to you via email!

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KEYBOARD | **£40** from Currys www.snipca.com/57357

Cherry Xtrfy K33

Right click

Cherry's wireless RGB-lit keyboard might fool you into thinking you're working on a premium keyboard with mechanical keys, thanks to the substantial 'click' each produces when you hit it and the longer-than-usual travel. Yet it's actually what Cherry calls a 'Mem-chanical' keyboard, with each key mounted on a plastic plunger that hits the membrane layer below. This mimics the feel of a mechanical keyboard, but for the price of a cheaper membrane keyboard. Normally you'd have to pay much more than £40 for this quality.

The Xtrfy 33 packs the most crucial keys of a full-sized keyboard into a compact design just 30cm wide. It's light to carry yet its its construction is up to Cherry's usual high standards. In fact, it's IP54 rated, which means it can survive the odd splash of water.

You can connect the keyboard to your PC using the 2.4GHz USB dongle or the USB cable (both supplied) or Bluetooth. Use the function keys or mode button at the rear to switch between your tablets and computers. The keys have markings for both Macs and Windows PCs.

Battery life from the internal battery isn't the best – you'll need to recharge it through the USB-C connection every two to three days with the RGB backlighting switched on, or every few weeks without it. Switching off the lighting means missing out on its vibrant RGB colours and some fun rainbow and pulsing effects, though they won't be to everyone's taste.

SPECIFICATIONS
75% layout • Bluetooth • Wireless 2.4GHz • USB-C • Membrane switches • 36x312x125mm (HxWxD) • Battery life not specified • 630g • Two-year warranty
www.snipca.com/57357

VERDICT A superb typing action for less, with great support for tablets, PCs and Macs

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Logitech Signature Slim Keyboard K950 £70 Prefer the lighter feel of a chiclet keyboard? This wireless beauty is one of the best

DASH CAM | **£450** from Amazon www.snipca.com/57358

70mai Dash Cam 4K T800

Eyes on the road

Most dash cams are great at capturing the cars in front of you but less use if you're rear-ended. The 70mai Dash Cam 4K T800 covers all angles with three cameras and some serious shooting power.

The main unit includes a 4K windscreen-facing camera (pictured top right) and a 1080p cockpit camera. Meanwhile, a smaller, rear-facing camera (pictured right) attaches to your car's back windscreen, capturing everything behind you in glorious 4K.

The cameras are easy to install on their adhesive mounts and can be powered from your 12V socket or wired into the car's electrics using an optional kit (£49 from www.snipca.com/57356). The main unit is relatively unobtrusive if you fit it near the rear-view mirror, and features a 3in IPS screen. It also connects to a 70mai app on your smartphone through a Wi-Fi 6 connection, so you can manage and transfer the 4K video files stored on the bundled 512GB microSD card.

Captured footage from all three cameras was excellent in our tests. Registration plates and road signs are easy to see, and image quality remains high in low light. What's more, an emergency recording feature detects possible incidents and retains any video it captured up to three minutes before and 30 seconds after the event. The parking mode with 24/7 monitoring is also useful, although it requires a 4G data SIM and a wired connection to your car's electrics to work.

SPECIFICATIONS
2x 3840x2160-pixel cameras (front and rear), 1x 1920x1080-pixel camera (interior) • 146-degree field of view (front, rear, interior) • 3in IPS screen • microSD card storage, 512GB card included • GPS • Wi-Fi 6 • 4G • USB-C • 45x122x62mm main camera (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/57358

VERDICT All-round coverage made easy, with impressive quality and a strong set of features

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Miofive S1 Ultra £130 A cheaper dual-camera setup with great 4K image quality from smaller units

SMART TV | **£239** from Amazon www.snipca.com/57351

Samsung UE43U8000F

Cheap thrills

Computeractive RECOMMENDED ★★★★

Samsung used to dominate the low-cost TV market, but has found it harder in recent years to compete with budget brands such as TCL and Hisense. The new U8000F series is its attempt to make up lost ground. With sizes from 43in to 85in at prices from £239 to £1,100, it's surprisingly affordable for a major brand TV with a 4K screen and HDR10+ support.

The 43in UE43U8000F we're testing here has a trim, matte-finish black frame. It's strikingly slim at the rear – albeit with a chunkier section near the bottom – and the only sign of cost-cutting is the stunted slot-in feet.

It comes with two remote controls – one larger with the full button count; the other a slimmer, smart remote with a smoother finish and stripped-back controls. You can also control it through Samsung's SmartThings mobile app or using gestures with a Galaxy Watch.

The UE43U8000F uses Samsung's Tizen operating system, delivering a comprehensive set of streaming and catch-up services, which are presented individually rather than packaged into a platform such as with Freely. A dedicated gaming hub gives you instant access to streaming services, including Xbox Cloud Streaming, GeForce Now and Boosteroid.

Connectivity is standard for a budget TV, with three HDMI ports, a single USB-A port, Ethernet and an aerial socket, though you also have Bluetooth 5.3 and Wi-Fi 5 built in. While gamers can't expect anything more than a 60Hz refresh rate, Samsung has still packed in ALLM to switch to Game mode when a console is connected, plus support for variable refresh rates for smoother gameplay.

This is a VA screen, giving you better contrast than IPS at the cost of reduced viewing angles. Pictures are nicely balanced, with nothing unduly garish or washed out, and consistently good across the TV's Standard, Movie and Filmmaker modes.

Low-lit scenes can sometimes look cloudy, while the backlighting can dim and brighten distractingly where scenes cut between light and dark shots, but it's still a noticeably stronger image than you'll get from most budget rivals. It also handles motion better. The similarly priced TCL 43P7K-UK (£249 from www.snipca.com/57352) gives you more three-dimensional and vibrant images thanks to its QLED colour tech but can't match the UE43U8000F for smooth movement.

Sound is impressive, using some smart processing to place dialogue and effects in the right area of the screen, making movies feel more immersive than you might expect with a basic 20W stereo-speaker setup. You might want more bass and volume, but what you get is clean and confident.

The UE43U8000F can't match mid-range (£500-£800) QLED sets, but its images and audio are more balanced and more absorbing than on your typical budget TV.

SPECIFICATIONS:
4K (3840x2160-pixel) resolution • 43in LED-backlit VA LCD screen • Supports HDR10, HDR10+, HLG • 3x HDMI ports • 1x USB port • 1x Ethernet port • 559x958x76mm (HxWxD) • 6.4kg www.snipca.com/57351

VERDICT With well-balanced pictures and immersive sound, this TV is terrific value

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE TCL 43P7K-UK £249 QLED tech gives you brighter images and richer colours, along with Dolby Vision and Google TV software

DO I REALLY NEED...

A vintage Mac alarm clock?

What is it?

A recreation of the classic 1984 Apple Mac made into a miniature bedside alarm clock. At just 112mm high, the Kokogol Maclock (£23 from www.snipca.com/57350, pictured) has a backlit digital screen, authentic stickers and a tiny floppy disc you can leave sticking out of the drive.

What does it do?

As you might expect it tells the time, but also the date, the day of the week and the current temperature. It can wake you up in the morning, and show the much-loved 'Happy Mac' face from the original's start-up sequence. The internal battery lasts 60 days (with backlight off) and charges over USB-C.

What's the catch?

It's a novelty item that's only available from a single worldwide store. That means it'll cost you an extra £9 in delivery charges.

So can I do without it?

It may be irresistible to Apple obsessives, but probably less so to the rest of us.

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Stylishly flat design, but how fast is it?

TerraMaster F2–425
Best budget NAS drive ever?

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Buy It

Find out which other products we liked. Buy our 2025 **Back Issue CD**: £19 from **www.snipca.com/57455**

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

MSI Prestige A16 AI+
£1,190 from www.snipca.com/57323
Tested Issue 718

A powerful Copilot+ laptop with 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD to guarantee fast performance. Screen is excellent too, while battery lasts an impressive 17 hours.

ALTERNATIVE PCSpecialist 16 Fusion British-made laptop with superb screen and built for advanced AI tasks. £970 from www.snipca.com/55094

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £758 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 11
£329 from www.snipca.com/54887
Tested Issue 711

With a faster processor and increased storage (from 64GB to 128GB), the 2025 edition of the iPad is simply stunning. Battery life is over 11 hours, which is better than any other iPad, including more expensive models.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

OnePlus Pad 3
£549 from www.snipca.com/55302
Tested Issue 714

With an incredibly fast processor and stunning 13.2in screen, this is the best ever Android tablet, and rivals the iPad Air. At launch both the 12GB RAM/256GB and 16GB/512GB versions were £529, so grab the latter as soon as possible.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £584 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£699 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as much more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £495 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

Samsung Galaxy A56
£499 from www.snipca.com/54585
Tested Issue 709

The successor to Samsung's mid-range A55, this has a stunning screen and lasted over 29 hours in our tests. It's faster than Google's Pixel 7a in all tasks, and has AI-powered photo tools.

ALTERNATIVE Google Pixel 7a Cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, it uses AI to improve photos and lasts 10 hours. Has fast processor and 8GB RAM. £460 from www.snipca.com/56073

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Hundreds of Trustpilot reviewers feel positive about Magnesium+. Mark, 49, says, 'Since moving to Magnesium+ I've really noticed I recover quicker. I've more energy and I'm less tired than I used to be.'

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

Wired2Fire AMD R8845
£680 from www.snipca.com/56881
Tested Issue 723

Outstandingly fast machine, with 32GB DDR5 RAM and a 2TB SSD. You can easily add a second SSD by unscrewing the case. Has all the ports you need and measures just 53x135x127mm (HxWxD).

ALTERNATIVE GMKtec NucBox K11 Speedy, powerful and easily upgradeable, with an OCuLink connection for graphics cards. £595 from www.snipca.com/54341

EBOOK READER

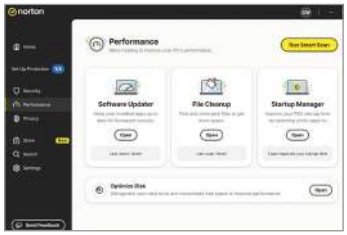
Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Deluxe 2025
£9.99 from www.snipca.com/56927
Tested Issue 629



Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm Gen Digital, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a three-device, 15-month licence at a special discount price. Other versions are available.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £24.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Obsbot Meet SE
£79 from www.snipca.com/54725
Tested Issue 710

The Meet SE from Chinese firm Obsbot beats the picture quality of our previous favourite, Logitech's C925e. Colours are vibrant and accurate, with terrific detail even in poor lighting thanks to a relatively wide aperture.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £45 from www.snipca.com/56585

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£184 from www.snipca.com/54190
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£98 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £98; 2TB costs £132.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £80 from www.snipca.com/56926

Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the **Buy It** award

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 3 Ugreen NASync DH2300 NAS drives

UGREEN

Winner of a Recommended award in Issue 725 (page 25), Ugreen's NASync DH2300 two-bay NAS drive is perfect for home entertainment, photo storage and easy data backup. It has a massive 60TB capacity, providing ample space to safely back up all your files, photos and videos, with extra room for future growth.

The AI automatically organises photos by faces, scenes and places. It also removes duplicates and creates personalised baby-growth albums – effortlessly preserving all your precious moments and enabling easy sharing with family via QR code or link.

The app is easy to use, letting you set up without any hassle and share files across Windows, macOS, Android, iOS, web browsers and smart TVs. Secure access from any device, anytime, anywhere!

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/57340 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 13 January. Good luck!

You can buy the **Ugreen NASync DH2300 NAS** drive for £169.99 from www.snipca.com/57337. For more information on Ugreen's products, including chargers, power banks, hubs and docks, visit https://uk.ugreen.com. Also 'like' its Facebook page (www.snipca.com/57338) and watch product demonstrations on its YouTube channel (www.snipca.com/57339).

PRINTER

HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e
£145 from www.snipca.com/53101
Tested Issue 700

A versatile cartridge printer-scanner for the home office that makes printing jobs quicker and easier than most of its inkjet rivals. Colour prints cost a reasonable 6p per page, while mono costs 2p. Printed text is superb and photos are pretty good too.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £150 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB
£180 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Sharp GM6245K
Has a fantastic 43in screen with superb contrast, and 4K content looks especially detailed. Comes with TiVo for paid-for streaming and Freely for free live channels and catch-up. £230 from www.snipca.com/55940

ROUTER

TP-Link Archer BE550
£170 from www.snipca.com/55981
Tested Issue 718

This tri-band router is the first Wi-Fi 7 model to be our top choice. It had enough bandwidth across our test house to stream six 4K movies simultaneously, and has five 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports.

ALTERNATIVE Asus RT-AXE7800
Our previous favourite is also tri-band, but only on Wi-Fi 6E. That still delivers incredibly fast speeds that stretched deep into our test house. £175 from www.snipca.com/52957

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PLUS
44 Phone & Tablet Tips
46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 In the Club: Switch to Affinity for newsletters

HOW TO...

Switch from GIMP to Affinity Photo

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Affinity Photo **Time required:** One hour

Something exciting happened at the end of October. Canva, best known for its online design and photo-editing tools, launched a single Affinity software suite, combining the image-editing, vector-graphics drawing and page-layout tools formerly found in Affinity's Photo, Designer and Publisher programs. Not only do they now exist under the same umbrella but the software is entirely free.

We've had time to put the new suite through its paces and we're impressed. The interface looks good, works fast and includes loads of exciting, innovative features. We've already used it to lay out a 16-page brochure from scratch; design a series of Christmas cards; create two posters for an art fair; and tweak dozens of photos.

Here, we'll explain why you should ditch popular image editor GIMP and switch to Affinity by outlining how both tools differ. First though, download Affinity from www.snipca.com/57259 – you'll need to create a free account.

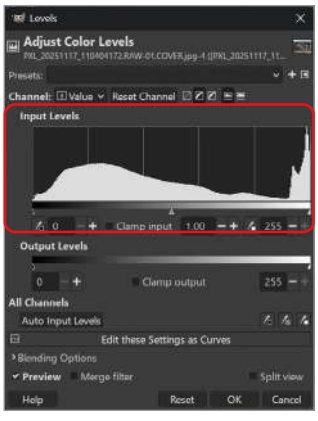
1 Export your photos from GIMP

GIMP and Affinity have their own file formats. That means neither can open the other's output unless it's saved in an intermediary format that they can both access. If you're working with standard photos, without layers, export them from GIMP as JPEGs by clicking File followed by 'Export...' and adding .jpg to the file name. GIMP will detect the extension and use the JPEG format. If your image has multiple layers and you want to preserve them for editing, use the Photoshop format by using the '.psd' extension instead.

2 Use layers to make adjustments

One of the quickest ways to boost your photos is to correct colour problems. Often, these will be caused by inconsistent lighting, which may be difficult to change before taking the photo. Both GIMP and Affinity let you remedy things afterwards but, with Affinity, you can do so in a non-destructive way – meaning your edits don't permanently alter the original image. This lets you experiment more freely, knowing you can easily undo edits later.

In GIMP, you use the Levels or Curves controls in the Colors menu.

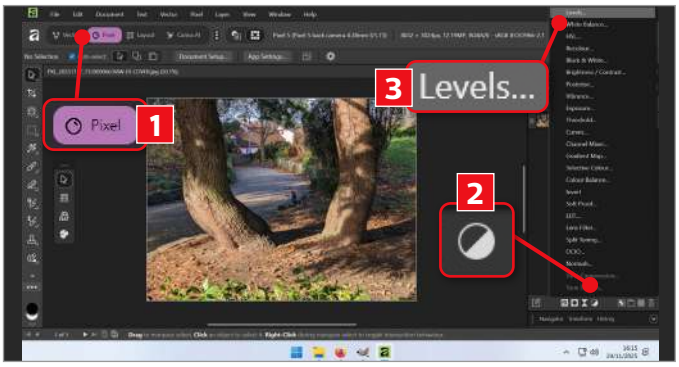


GIMP's Levels controls show a histogram representing the tones in your image

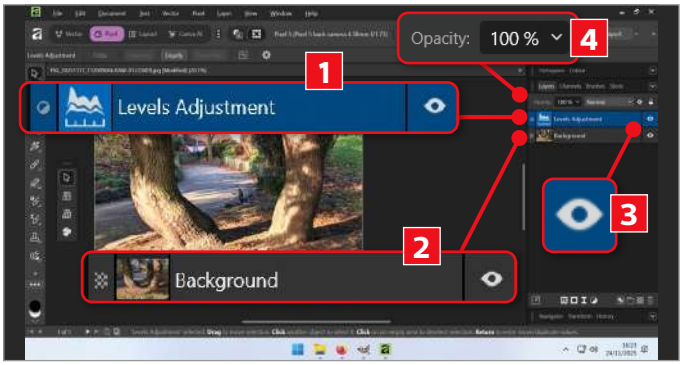
Levels adjusts the brightness level of the image, and presents you with a horizontal histogram representing the tones in your image (see screenshot left), from black on the far left to white on the far right.

You drag the pointers at either end so they touch the start and end points of the histogram to optimise the range of tones in your image. You can also drag a pointer at the centre to brighten things up or darken them.

With the Curves control, you can adjust the angle of a curve that represents the intensity of each brightness level within your image.



Affinity lets you apply levels adjustments on a single layer



The 'Levels Adjustment' layer appears above the Background layer

However, when you apply changes in GIMP they are baked into the image, and can't be adjusted later. That's not the case with Affinity.

Open your image in Affinity and make sure you are working in the Pixel studio (1 in our screenshot above). Now, click the Adjustments button at the bottom of the Layers palette 2 followed by 'Levels...' 3 on the menu that appears.

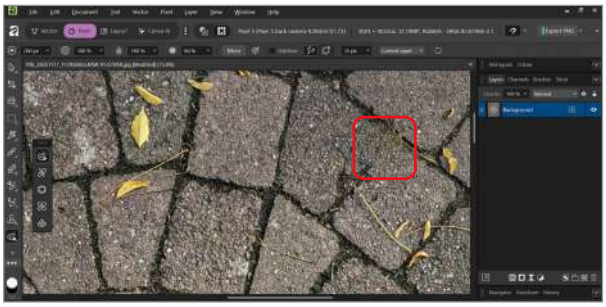
Now use the sliders in the box to adjust the overall balance of your image, as you would in GIMP. Although they're not attached to the histogram the way they are in GIMP, the Black Level, White Level and Gamma sliders are equivalent to the left, right and centre pointers in GIMP.

Again, try to adjust the settings so that the vertical lines overlaying the histogram touch the edges of the histogram itself, but don't worry too much if you stray into the graph (as we have with the line on the right in our screenshot below). As long as the image looks better than it did when you started making your adjustments it should be fine.

Close the box when you've finished then look at the Layers panel, where you'll see a new Levels Adjustment layer (1 in our screenshot top right) above the Background layer 2 that contains your photo. Because it's not burned into the image the way it is in GIMP, the adjustment you just made can be quickly switched off by clicking the eye icon 3. You can also adjust the strength by reducing the Opacity in the box immediately above it from 100 per cent 4.

3 Remove objects from your image

When you're working with a complicated image like the one pictured below, you may need to sample several areas, and change the sample point as you work across the object that needs to be removed. We want to remove the leaf (circled) at the top right.



GIMP removed the leaf, though we had to sample several areas to make it work properly

We tried doing this with GIMP's healing brush tool by pressing H then zooming the image to frame the leaf. We then pressed Ctrl+click and painted over it. GIMP then sampled the source area we selected and used it to paint over the object we wanted to remove.

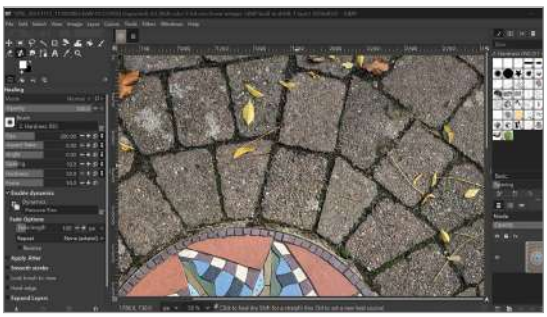
We want to remove the leaf at the top right of this photo

We're pretty happy with the result (see screenshot above), but because the leaf was close to two gaps between the bricks we did have to sample several areas to account for the differing angles and the flat layer in between.

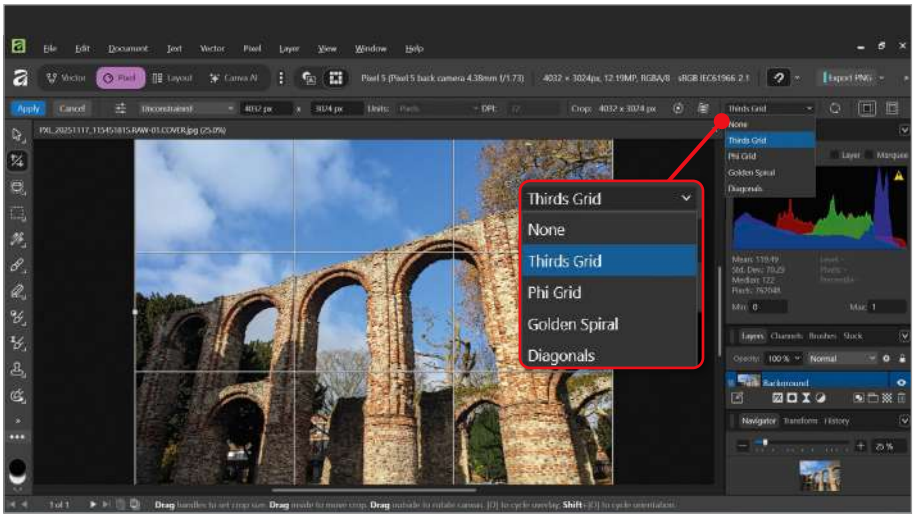
Affinity has a similar healing brush – press J to launch it – but you might get better results with Affinity's InPainting tool. With this, you don't need to worry about selecting a source to reference when removing unwanted objects: just click and drag over the object and Affinity will examine the surrounding area and fill in the gaps.

We've used it to remove the same leaf and the brickwork has been well preserved (see screenshot below), even though carrying out our edit only required us to select a fairly wide brush and make a single stroke across the leaf.

We've dragged the sliders to improve the balance of light in our photo



Affinity's InPainting tool doesn't require that you first select a source for reference



You can overlay the image with helpful guides when cropping

4 Crop your images

When cropping an image in GIMP, you can set a fixed aspect ratio in the sidebar. In Affinity, you'll find this option at the top of the document window.

To help you decide where to crop, in the dropdown menu to the right of the toolbar select whether to overlay the cropped area with a grid of thirds, golden spiral or another option (see screenshot above). Using these as your guide, and making sure they align with important focal points in your picture when cropping, helps to create a pleasing composition.

GIMP's alignment tools, which let you set one object to line up with the centre or edge of another, can be found on a sub-menu of the Move tool – switch to this by pressing Q. In Affinity, you'll find these by clicking Layout at the top then using the options in the Alignment menu, which you'll find at the far right.

5 Zoom using your keyboard

In GIMP, you can zoom to 100, 200, 400, 800 and 1600 per cent by pressing 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively on the top row of your keyboard. If you were to do this in Affinity it would set the opacity level of the selected layer to 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 per cent respectively.

We find Affinity's shortcuts more convenient in day-to-day usage. Moreover, by pressing the Ctrl key in combination with the number keys 1 to 4 you can zoom into images in Affinity the way you can in GIMP. You can also use Ctrl+8 to display the image in actual size and Ctrl+0 to fit your image within the program window. Less intuitively, if you want to fit the image within the program window when using GIMP, you need to press Ctrl+Alt+J.

6 Add text to an image

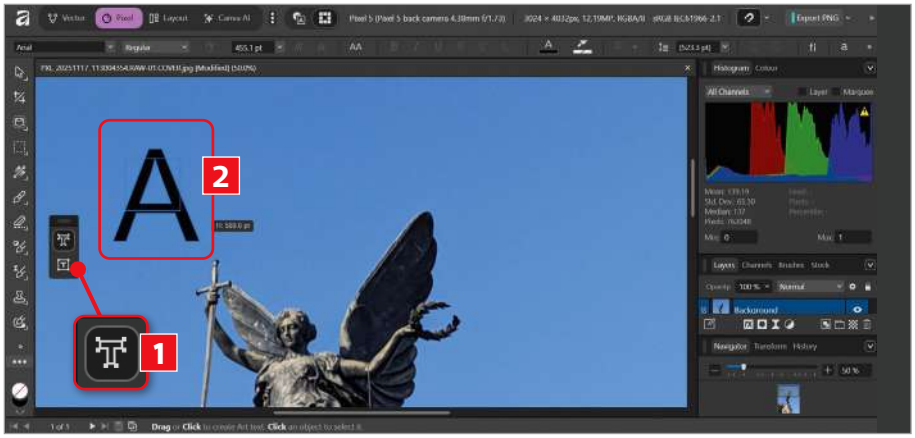
When you want to add text to an image in GIMP, you press T to switch to the text tool, drag out a text box on your image, then start typing. You can use the floating formatting toolbar to change the text's appearance, or do this using the sidebar if you prefer.

Affinity has two text tools, which you can cycle between by pressing T. One is a regular text-frame tool which, like GIMP's, requires you to drag out a text area, type into it, then use the formatting options on the top toolbar.

However, there's also a flexible Artistic Text Tool (1 in our screenshot below), which can be quicker if you need to make changes to the size and position of the text as you refine your design.

Once you've selected it, click and drag across the image. Instead of a text box this displays a letter A, which continues to expand as you keep dragging 2. Stop dragging when it's roughly the size you need, then start typing and select the font style and emphasis – such as bold or italics – from the top toolbar.

The really clever bit happens when you need to change the font size. While you could use the size menu on the top toolbar, you can also resize the box containing your text. Doing so dynamically resizes the text so it continues to fit. On a complicated layout with many elements, this is often the easiest way to make sure you can accommodate everything.



Use Affinity's Artistic Text Tool to make changes to the size and position of text

How I use Affinity and GIMP

I use GIMP on my Linux machine and have long used Affinity Photo, Designer and Publisher on my Mac and iPad. Now that those three programs have been rolled into one I'll be using Affinity on both my Mac and Windows machine (where I previously used a mix of programs). However, I'll be sticking with GIMP on the Linux machine, because Affinity isn't available for that operating system.

Nik Rawlinson

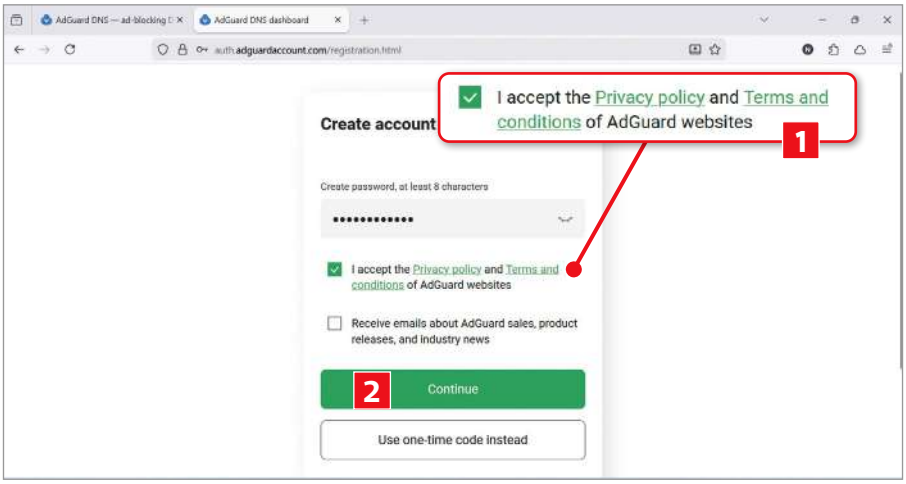
How do you use Affinity and Gimp? Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

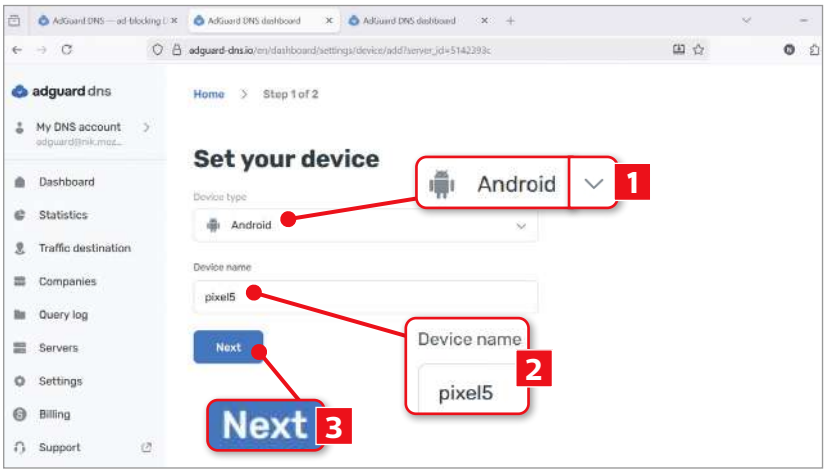
Block mobile ads using AdGuard DNS

What you need: AdGuard DNS for iOS or Android
Time required: 30 minutes

Whenever your phone downloads something from the internet – whether it's an image, an email or an ad embedded in a web page – it finds that item by searching for the numerical address of the domain that hosts it using a DNS server. As long as that server knows which domains host ads, trackers and other unwanted items, it can block your phone's access to those domains while still retrieving the rest of the web page or email that contains these unwanted elements. The result is web content largely free of adverts. AdGuard is one such DNS server, and its new mobile app makes blocking ads on your phone easier than ever. Here, we explain how to use it.

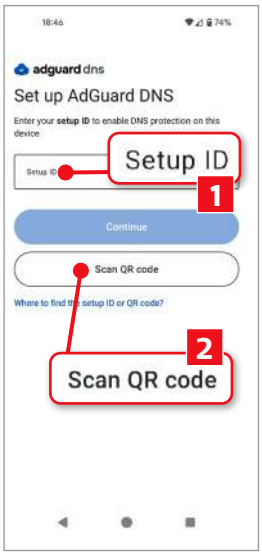
STEP 1 First, create an AdGuard account. Visit www.snipca.com/57264 and click 'Log in' at the top of the screen. Provide an email address, which you'll use to access your account, and click Continue. On the following screen, create your password, then tick the terms and conditions box 1. Click Continue 2 and AdGuard will send a six-digit code to your inbox to verify your address. Type the code back into the website and click Continue.

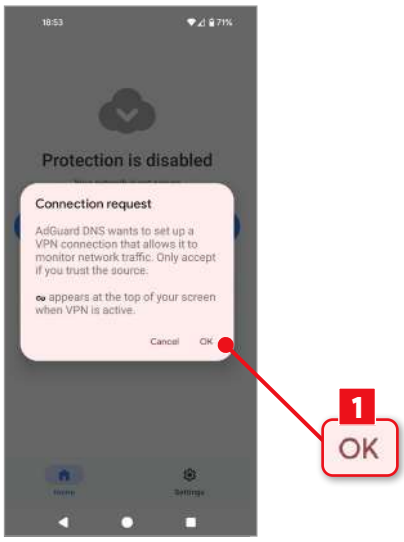

Create account
I accept the Privacy policy and Terms and conditions of AdGuard websites
1
Create password, at least 8 characters
I accept the Privacy policy and Terms and conditions of AdGuard websites
Receive emails about AdGuard sales, product releases, and industry news
2
Continue
Use one-time code instead



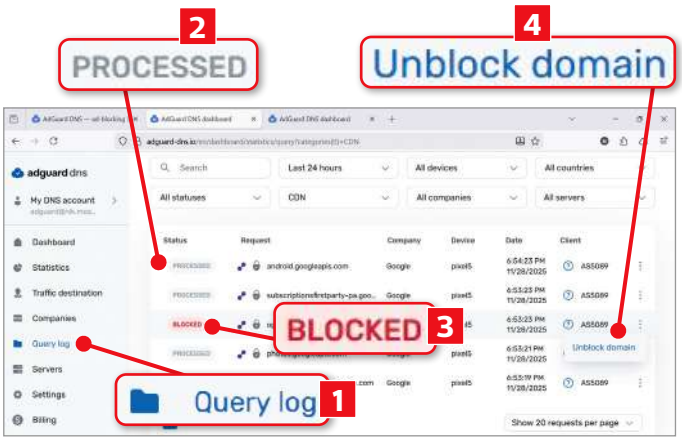
STEP 2 Tick the box beside the end-user licence and privacy policy and click Continue, then for the moment skip the free trial of the AdGuard DNS Personal account on the following screen. Click 'Connect device', then select either Android or iOS 1, depending on your phone, and give the device a name 2 before clicking Next 3. On the following screen, click the arrow beside 'Use the AdGuard DNS app' and make a note of the long string of letters and numbers below Setup ID.

STEP 3 Now switch to your phone and install the AdGuard DNS mobile app (Android www.snipca.com/57265; iOS www.snipca.com/57266), then log in using the email address and password you specified in Step 1. You'll also be asked to enter the setup ID you noted. Either type this into the box 1, or tap 'Scan QR code' 2 and point your phone's camera at the QR code displayed on your computer screen. Check that the details displayed on your phone match those you just set up on your PC and, if they do, click Connect.



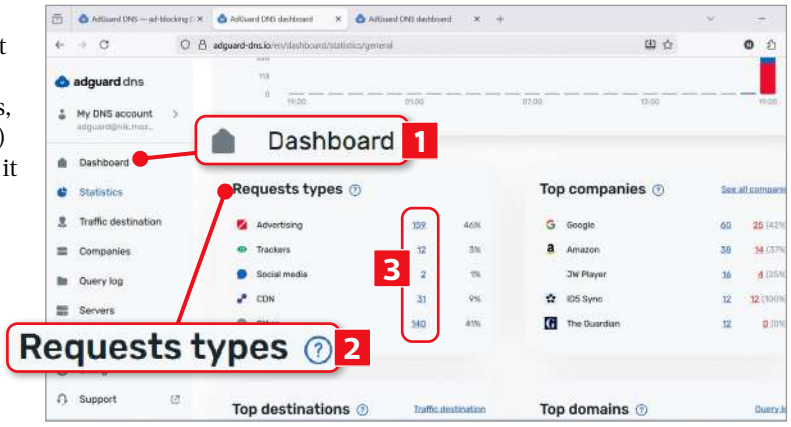

Protection is disabled
Connection request
AdGuard DNS wants to set up a VPN connection that allows it to monitor network traffic. Only accept if you trust the source.
∞ appears at the top of your screen when VPN is active.
Cancel
OK
1
OK

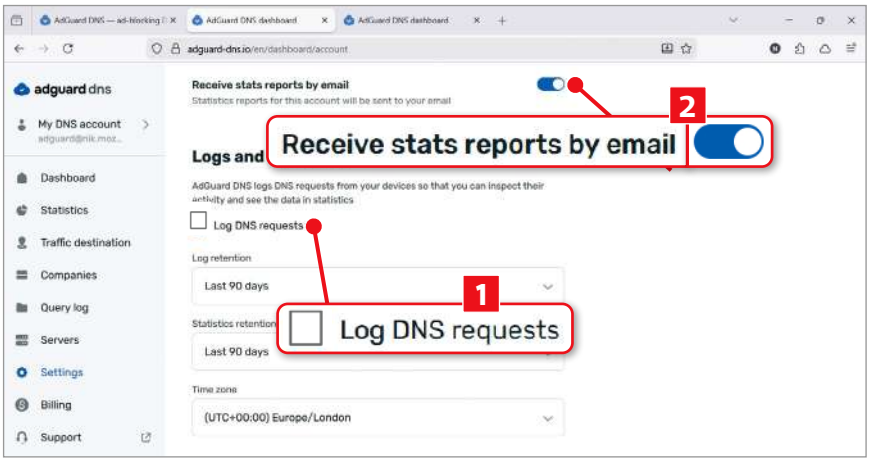
STEP 4 Next, click Enable below the 'Protection is disabled' notification. You'll be warned that completing this step will create a VPN profile. Click 'Allow' and you'll see a second warning, this time from your phone, notifying you that this allows AdGuard DNS to monitor your internet traffic (which is why you should only ever set up a VPN connection with a provider you trust). Click OK 1. Your phone will connect to AdGuard's VPN service, and you'll see 'VPN' (on iOS) or a key (Android) at the top of the screen.



STEP 5 Browse as you normally would and AdGuard will route all of your traffic through its servers, stripping out ads and trackers in the process. There are limited options within the app, which you'll find by tapping Settings on the bottom bar. More interesting is what you'll see in the AdGuard dashboard on your PC. Return to that and click 'Query log' 1 in the sidebar. This reveals a list of all the addresses your phone has connected to, even if you didn't type them yourself, and whether they were allowed ('Processed') 2 or blocked 3. If AdGuard has blocked a domain that you need to access, click the three dots to the right of its entry, then click 'Unblock domain' 4.

STEP 6 To learn more about any blocked content, click Dashboard 1, then scroll down to your phone at the bottom of the screen and click Statistics. Under 'Requests types' 2 you can see how many trackers, social-media elements, content-delivery networks (CDN) and more tried to send you data that was blocked before it reached your device. Click the numbered links beside each one for more information 3.





STEP 7 If you prefer not to have this kind of information logged, you can turn off this option. Click 'Settings' on the left, then scroll down to 'Logs and Statistics', and untick the box beside 'Log DNS requests' 1. You'll see in our screenshot that the option to 'Receive stats reports by email' is switched on 2. If this is something you don't need, you can turn it off here.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

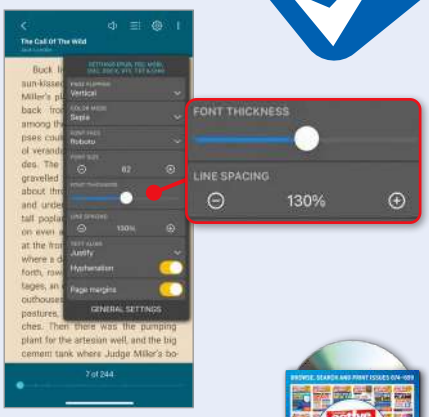
Read all ebook formats with ReadEra

In your answer to Tom Rathbone's question about ebook formats (Issue 724, page 69) you could have mentioned the app ReadEra (https://readera.org). I installed it on my iPad earlier this year and it supports so many different ebook formats that I've not found one I can't open. You just import a book then read.

Most of its features are free and there are also options to convert the text into audio through the 'Text to Speech' feature. There are some handy customisation settings including making the font thicker and changing the line spacing (pictured).

Incidentally, I'm not the only fan of ReadEra. While installing it on my wife's Android phone I noticed it has a 4.9-star rating on the Google Play Store. Don't think I've ever seen an app so popular.

Jonathan Young

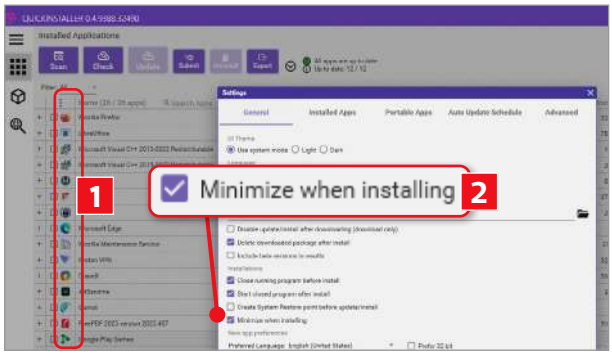


Jonathan wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD **Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433**

SOFTWARE

Minimise Quick Installer as it updates programs

I'm impressed by the simple design of Quick Installer (www.quickinstaller.net), which you recommended as one of your best new programs of 2026 (Issue 724, page 56). I like how it shows the software logos down the left-hand column (1 in our screenshot above right).



As I always do when I start using new tools, I looked in the settings for interesting options. One that I ticked was the option to minimise Quick Installer after you've set it to update the programs you've ticked. That means Quick Installer automatically minimises as it updates, leaving your desktop free for other tasks. To activate this, click the settings cog top right then make sure the General tab is selected and tick 'Minimize when installing' 2.

On another note, it managed to download PowerToys after I had failed to do so repeatedly from its official site.

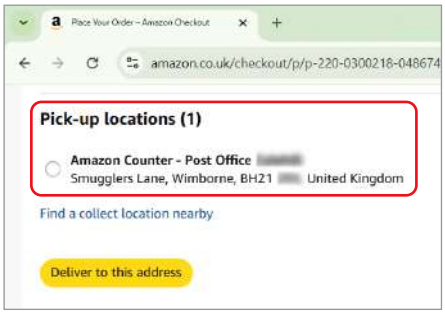
David Cohen

ONLINE SHOPPING

Get Amazon items delivered to lockers or agents

Following Issue 723's Cover Feature ('Ultimate hacks for Amazon') my tip for avoiding delivery charges is to look for products that are shipped by Amazon then find the nearest Amazon locker or agent and have it delivered there. It's completely free regardless of the order value. Finding your nearest collection point is an option during the checkout process – click Change at the top, then scroll down to the 'Pick-up locations' and select your location below (see screenshot below). In my experience, it usually arrives at the collection point earlier than the promised delivery date.

Paul Richardson


Place Your Order – Amazon Checkout
amazon.co.uk/checkout/p/p-220-0300218-048674
Pick-up locations (1)
Amazon Counter - Post Office
Smugglers Lane, Wimborne, BH21 United Kingdom
Find a collect location nearby
Deliver to this address

Why I stopped using...

A smart TV

I know the word 'smart' is used for most gadgets these days, but I had never heard of its opposite 'dumb' to describe those that aren't so smart.

I needed a new TV to replace my so-called smart model and had become bored with the dross on Netflix, Disney+ and so on.

And what I use instead...

My eye was drawn to the new TVs from UK manufacturer Mitchell & Brown, that they proudly call 'dumb'. Your story (see Issue 723, page 9) said many customers were asking for sets that "behave just like the reliable televisions of old". That's what I wanted.

I still need a decent screen size, so bought the **JB-43T1811 TV**, with a 40in screen, for £339 (www.snipca.com/57335, pictured). It has TiVo and Freely built in and on-demand apps from the main broadcasters, including the underrated U.

That all still feels quite smart to me, but then the first set I had in 1962 was 15 inches and had two channels!

Gareth Llewelyn

Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Handy hints and tips from your fellow readers

Email us your tips: letters@computeractive.co.uk

OPERATING SYSTEM

Use your voice to type in Zorin OS

Following Issue 724's How To (page 35) I've now installed Zorin OS (https://zorin.com) on my Windows 10 PC and it looks as sleek as you said it would. But you didn't mention what I've found to be its most surprising asset. I downloaded and installed Chrome to see if it ran Google Docs. It does and with voice typing (www.snipca.com/57320).

I then discovered I could download Edge for Linux, with access to Microsoft Office 365, complete with CoPilot, OneDrive and the ability to dictate documents. Its performance compares very well with my Geekom A5 mini PC running Windows 11. Indeed, it performs so well, I'm wondering why I bothered buying the A5! Not sure I would've done had I known about Zorin at the time.

Mostyn Davies

SECURITY

Use browser extensions to keep your VPN unblocked

Issue 725's feature (page 62) on stopping sites blocking your VPN was timely. It's happened to me a lot recently, which is incredibly frustrating. I'll try all your tips, but I'd also like to recommend readers try the browser extensions Privacy Badger (https://privacybadger.org) and uBlock Origin Lite (www.snipca.com/55952). Whenever I've been blocked, I activate these extensions and it sometimes tricks the blocker and grants me access. I think Privacy Badger blocks trackers that follow your activity across the web, while uBlock Origin blocks scripts a site might use to identify you.

Carl Gibson

I've got around VPN blocks by connecting to the web at home using mobile data. This doesn't always work, but it's worth a try. Having read up on why this works, it seems that mobile networks use a different connection and range of IP addresses to home broadband providers.

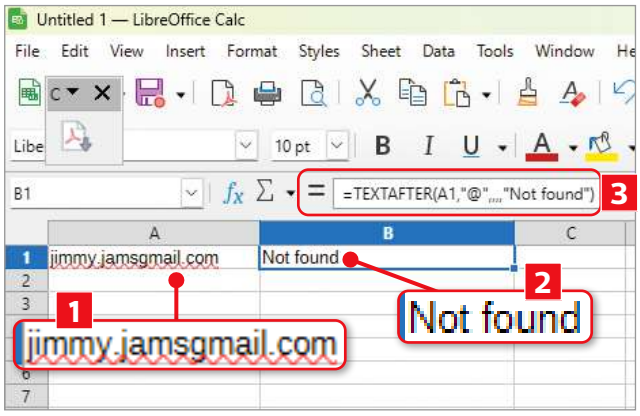
Jim Branson

OFFICE

Use TEXTAFTER and TEXTBEFORE to find missing words

Another way to use the TEXTAFTER and TEXTBEFORE formulas in LibreOffice Calc (see Issue 725, page 47) is to decide what to show if a character or word you specify isn't found in a cell. To do this, you simply add four commas before the last bracket, then type what you want to appear.

In my example, I'm looking for the @ symbol in the email address in A1 (1 in our screenshot right) and want the message 'Not found' to appear if the symbol isn't there 2. To get this result I need to type =TEXTAFTER(A1,"@",,,,"Not found") 3. This works for TEXTBEFORE also.



Denise March

ACCESSIBILITY

Play audio from Bluetooth speaker to hearing aid

We have a friend who needs to use a Bluetooth hearing aid. We decided to help extend her listening options by giving her a Bluetooth speaker/player to transmit spoken words, music and radio to her hearing aid.

We used the ZoeeTree S1 portable Bluetooth speaker (pictured right) to play music, FM radio and MP3 audiobooks for some time. This is a battery-powered device and plays for about five hours of content (between charges) on USB sticks and TF cards. Should the battery drain we're able to run it with the charging cable.

I purchased a wireless Bluetooth transmitter receiver on Amazon for £7.69 and connected it to the ZoeeTree speaker via the 3.5mm standard Aux/earphone socket. You just plug it in and play.

Chris Adams

Reader recommends...

GMKtec NucBox G10 mini PC

£310 from Amazon www.snipca.com/56114

I've been interested in all the reports in *Computeractive* about the prices of computers rocketing in 2026. One consequence might be mini PCs becoming even more popular, especially at the cheaper end.

One of the best purchases has to be the NucBox G10. I downsized to a retirement flat in September and decided to ditch my old Dell tower PC for this titchy machine.

It deals with everything I've asked of it, including streaming music and TV. This surprised me a little because your review (Issue 719, page 22) suggested you'd have to stick with simple tasks like web browsing and using office software.

It has loads of ports, including for 2.5Gbps Ethernet. This is handy because its Wi-Fi 5 is becoming an old standard. It works with the several keyboards and mice I've got. Overall, I'm delighted with it.

Ben Havers

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

FIREFOX

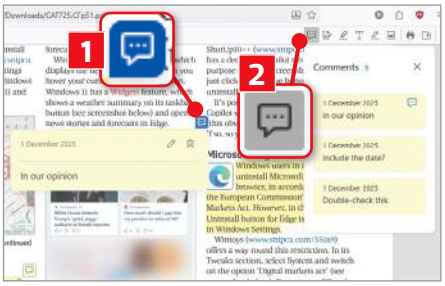
Add comments to your PDFs

Firefox 145, released in mid-November, improves the browser's built-in PDF viewer. You can now add comments to documents you open in Firefox, as well as highlighting sections of text.

Drag a PDF into the browser to load it in the viewer, then highlight the section of the document you want to comment on. Click the Comment (speech-bubble) icon that appears, type your comment and click Add.

You can read your comments by hovering your cursor over the 'Show comment' icon in the PDF (1 in our screenshot below). Click this icon to also edit or delete a comment.

To view all the comments you've added to a PDF, click the Comment button on the top-right toolbar 2. Comments are saved with the PDF when you click the Save button.

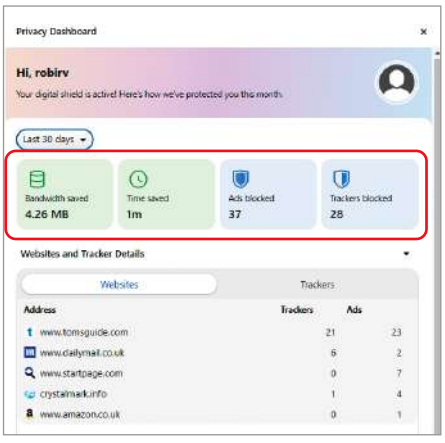


VIVALDI

See how many ads and trackers you've blocked

One of the biggest improvements in Vivaldi 7.7, released in mid-November, is to the browser's Privacy Dashboard. This has been redesigned to make it easier to see how many ads and trackers the browser's built-in filters have blocked.

To view this information, click the shield icon to the left of the address bar and select Show Privacy Dashboard. This shows you the number of ads and trackers Vivaldi has blocked over the last 30 days, and the amount of bandwidth and time this has saved you (see screenshot below left).



Privacy Dashboard also provides data for specific websites and trackers, so you can identify the worst privacy invaders. Click the dropdown menu to view blocking information for the past seven days or all time.

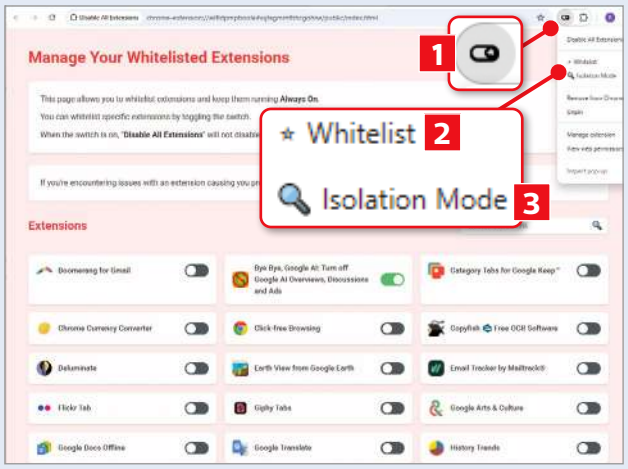
CHROMIUM

Disable all extensions with one click

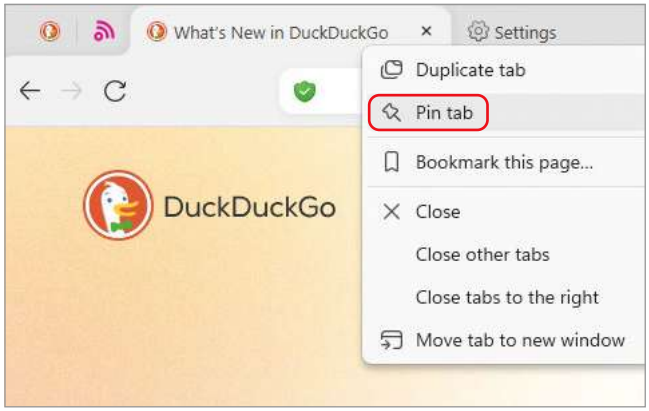
When you're having trouble loading a web page or your browser is using too much memory, disabling your extensions often solves the problem. But Chrome lacks the option to do so quickly – you need to go to its Manage Extensions page (chrome://extensions) and switch them off individually.

Disable All Extensions (www.snipca.com/57272) works exactly as its name suggests by disabling all extensions when you click its toolbar button (1 in our screenshot) – pin this for easy access. Click the button again to turn your extensions back on.

You can whitelist extensions you want to keep active 2 and use the Isolation Mode 3 to determine which add-ons are causing problems. This divides your extensions into groups, and enables one group at a time to help you identify the troublemakers.



Disable All Extensions works in all Chromium browsers, though Edge has its own option for disabling extensions on the current website. Just click the Extensions button and switch off 'Allow extensions on [site name]'.



DUCKDUCKGO

Pin important tabs to keep them open

DuckDuckGo has updated its Windows browser with the long-awaited ability to pin tabs. This stops you closing important web pages accidentally, so you can return to them after viewing other pages.

Simply right-click a tab and choose 'Pin tab' (see screenshot above) to pin it to the left-hand side of the browser. Select 'Unpin tab' to make the page closeable again. Note that, unlike other browsers, DuckDuckGo doesn't save your pinned tabs when you restart it.

You can pin the browser itself to the Windows taskbar by clicking the three-line menu button and choosing 'Pin DuckDuckGo to taskbar'.

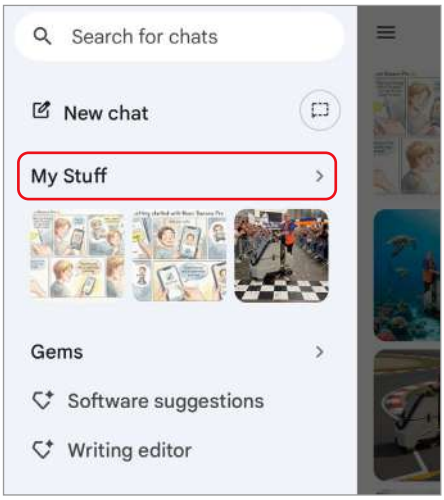
GEMINI

Generate better answers and images

Google has upgraded Gemini's AI model to version 3, to provide "state-of-the-art reasoning to your most complex problems". It has also upgraded its image generator to Nano Banana Pro, to produce more realistic photos, allow for more advanced tweaks and create more accurate and legible text.

Although these improvements are available to all users, you only get a limited number of Gemini 3 prompts for free each day. For example, you can only generate two images per day using Nano Banana Pro, before you're reverted to the standard AI model.

The Gemini mobile app has a new My Stuff folder, where you can access all the content you've created. Just tap the three-line menu in the top-left corner and choose My Stuff (see screenshot below).



META AI

Generate and edit videos for free

Meta AI's free Vibes feature is now available in the UK, in its app for Android (www.snipca.com/57275) and iOS (www.snipca.com/57276). This lets you create videos from text prompts and photos, restyle them using different themes, and add music and voiceovers.

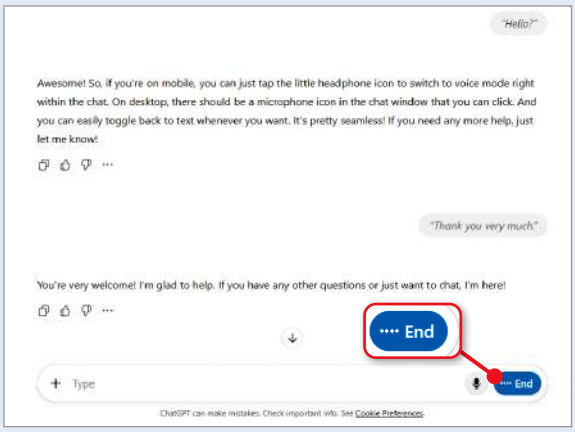
Vibes launches automatically when you open the Meta AI app, showing a TikTok-style feed of other users' AI-created videos. Tap the plus sign top right to generate your own, either by typing or speaking a description, or by adding a photo from your camera or gallery.

Once Vibes has created the video, tap the clip to access the editing and restyling options, and choose music for the soundtrack (see screenshot above right).

CHATGPT

Access voice mode directly in chats

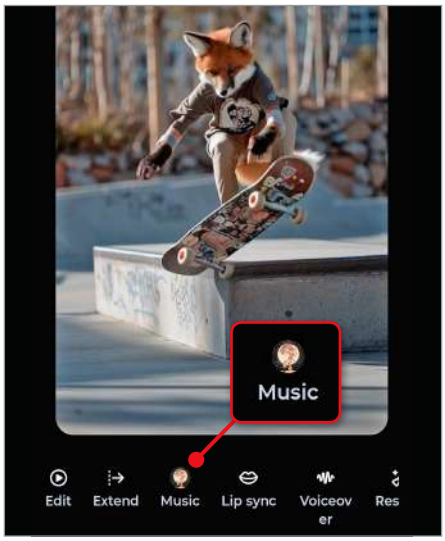
OpenAI has integrated ChatGPT's voice mode with its text chats, so you can switch between typing and speaking as required. Previously, activating voice mode took you away from the conversation to a separate screen.


"Hello?"
Awesome! So, if you're on mobile, you can just tap the little headphone icon to switch to voice mode right within the chat. On desktop, there should be a microphone icon in the chat window that you can click. And you can easily toggle back to text whenever you want. It's pretty seamless! If you need any more help, just let me know!
"Thank you very much."
You're very welcome! I'm glad to help. If you have any other questions or just want to chat, I'm here!
End
Type
End

To switch to voice mode, click or tap the 'Use voice mode' icon on the right-hand side of the message box. ChatGPT's default voice assistant will greet you and respond to your spoken queries and prompts. Click or tap the End button (see screenshot) to switch back to a text chat.

Usefully, ChatGPT provides a real-time transcript of your voice-mode conversations. While you're in voice mode, it will speak its responses even when you type a prompt.

To change the default voice, click or tap your username and choose Settings. On the ChatGPT website, click General and select your preferred voice. In the ChatGPT app, select Voice to explore the options.



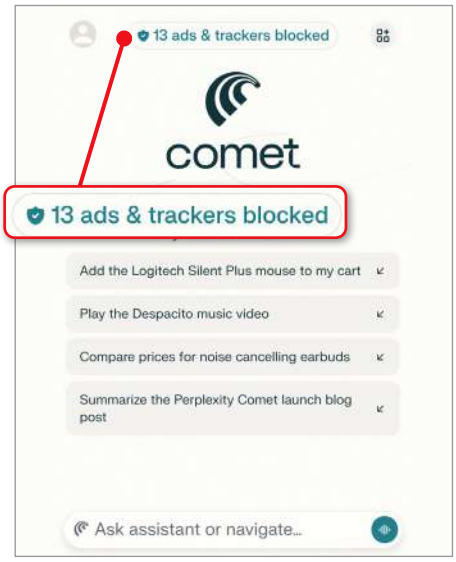
You can also extend the duration of the video beyond a few seconds.

Vibes videos can be shared publicly and to other Meta apps, or you can download them to your device and keep them private.

PERPLEXITY

Try the new Comet mobile browser

Perplexity has launched an Android version of its agentic browser Comet (www.snipca.com/57278). Like its desktop counterpart, this includes an AI assistant you can ask to perform useful tasks such as compare product prices, find and play videos, and summarise online articles.


13 ads & trackers blocked
comet
13 ads & trackers blocked
Add the Logitech Silent Plus mouse to my cart
Play the Despacito music video
Compare prices for noise cancelling earbuds
Summarize the Perplexity Comet launch blog post
Ask assistant or navigate...

Comet for Android blocks ads and trackers by default (see screenshot above) and can be customised with widgets such as a clock and weather forecast. It includes a voice mode and incognito mode, but can't yet sync your browsing data with the PC version.

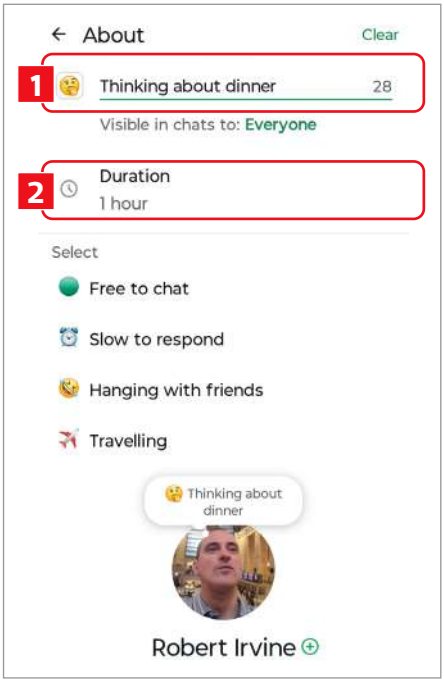
Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID & iOS

Share your About status in WhatsApp

WhatsApp has relaunched its often-overlooked About feature to let you share your current mood or activities with your contacts. This is less elaborate than and separate from the 'Add status' feature on the Updates tab, which has options for sharing photos, videos and music.

You traditionally see About information when browsing your list of contacts. However, unless a person has updated their status, this will just say 'Hey there! I am using WhatsApp'.



With the improved feature, your About status appears below your name at the top of one-to-one chats, and as a thought bubble on your profile picture. WhatsApp says this makes it "more visible, timely and easier to use" (www.snipca.com/57289).

To set your About status, open WhatsApp's Settings, tap your profile picture and choose About. Enter a short update of up to 50 characters (1 in our screenshot left), optionally accompanied by an emoji, or choose a suggestion such as 'Free to chat'.

Specify a duration for your About status 2, from one hour to one week (the default is one day), and who it will be visible to – everyone or just select contacts. Tap the tick button to save and share.

ANDROID & iOS

Switch to Chrome's incognito mode in one tap

Google has added an AI Mode button to the Chrome app for Android and iOS to provide AI-powered responses to your search queries. The button appears below the search box on the browser's New Tab page (1 in our screenshot above right), where you can tap it instead of performing a traditional web search.

More useful, in our opinion, is the new Incognito button 2 next to AI Mode. Tap this to instantly switch to incognito mode when you want to browse privately, without your browsing history and website cookies being saved on your mobile device.

It's more convenient than opening Chrome's three-dot menu and choosing 'New incognito tab' every time you want to go private. Sadly, there's no way to hide the AI Mode button and keep the Incognito shortcut.

ANDROID & iOS

Access DuckDuckGo using widgets

DuckDuckGo has introduced new widgets for its Android browser (www.snipca.com/57281) that make it easier to access its private search engine and AI assistant. Rather than open the browser whenever you want to search with DuckDuckGo or chat to Duck.ai, you can tap one of the widgets to launch those tools from your home screen.

To add the new widgets, long-press your home screen, select Widgets and scroll down to the DuckDuckGo section. Select 'Search and Duck.ai' for instant access to both privacy tools, or 'Search and Favorites' (1 in our

BEST NEW APPS — What you should install this fortnight

Discogs

Free

Android www.snipca.com/57297
iOS www.snipca.com/57298

Music-cataloguing and trading service Discogs has revamped its mobile app with a smarter homepage and several useful new features. These include a barcode scanner for adding vinyl and CDs to your inventory using your phone's camera, real-time pricing data and notifications when a disc you want becomes available.

Sky Remote

Free

Android www.snipca.com/57291
iOS www.snipca.com/57292

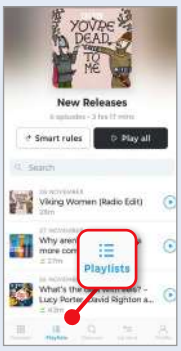
Sky customers with Sky Glass TVs and Sky Stream pucks can now control their devices using this new app, instead of using their physical remotes. It lets you change channels, navigate menus, play and pause TV shows, and turn your device off, but strangely doesn't include a volume control – hopefully Sky will add one soon.

Pocket Casts

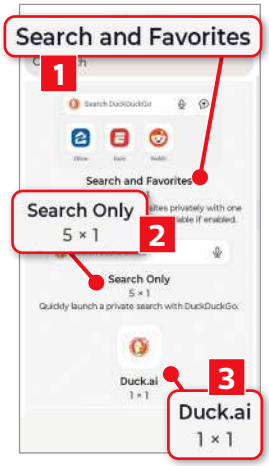
Free*

Android www.snipca.com/57285
iOS www.snipca.com/57286

This excellent podcast player has added the much-requested option to create playlists from episodes of your favourite shows. On the Playlists tab, tap the plus button then 'Create playlist' and choose the episodes to include. Alternatively, use the 'Smart playlist' feature to have Pocket Casts compile a playlist for you.



*Contains in-app purchases



screenshot left) to also include shortcuts to your favourite sites.

Alternatively, choose either the Search Only 2 or Duck.ai widget 3 to use the tools separately. Drag the widget to the desired position on your home screen.

DuckDuckGo also provides widgets for its iOS browser (www.snipca.com/57282), but these don't yet include the separate Search Only and Duck.ai options. Long-press your home screen, tap Edit then Add Widget, and select DuckDuckGo.

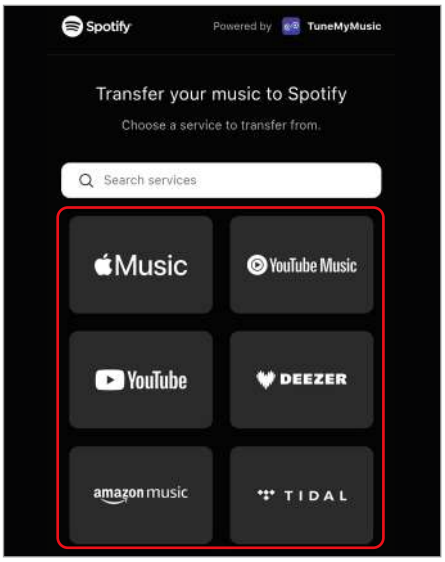
ANDROID & iOS

Import playlists from other services to Spotify

Spotify now lets you import your playlists from other music-streaming services. This follows its recent integration with the playlist-transfer tool TuneMyMusic (www.tunemymusic.com), and saves you having to re-compile playlists in Spotify.

To import playlists, swipe down to the bottom of the Your Library tab in the Spotify app and tap 'Import your music'. Press 'Get Started' and choose the service to import playlists from – options include Apple Music, YouTube Music, Amazon Music, Deezer and Tidal (see screenshot below).

Grant TuneMyMusic access to your account and it will detect your saved playlists and import them to Spotify (they won't be deleted from the original service). The new feature is available to all Spotify users, regardless of plan.



ANDROID & iOS

Swipe emails and block senders in Proton Mail

The Proton Mail app for Android (www.snipca.com/57293) and iOS (www.snipca.com/57294) now supports swipe navigation. This means you can jump to the next or previous email in your inbox by swiping left or right, without returning to the main message list.

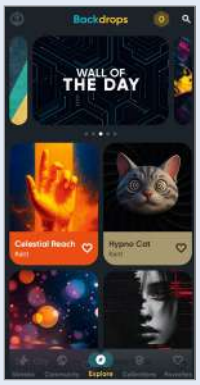
If this doesn't work, tap Proton Mail's three-line menu button and choose Settings then 'App customizations'. Switch on the option 'Swipe to next email'.

Additionally, you can now block specific email addresses. Press the name of the sender in an email and choose 'Block this address' (see screenshot above).

BEST APPS FOR... Customising your phone or tablet

Backdrops

Free*
Android www.snipca.com/57302
iOS www.snipca.com/57303
Backdrops offers a huge choice of wallpapers for customising your phone or tablet's screen, created by both its own team and the Backdrops community. Swipe through the options on the Explore screen or browse themed collections, such as Earth and Steel Touch. You can set your chosen design as your home or lock screen, or both.
Best For Customising your wallpaper



Zedge

Free*
Android www.snipca.com/57305
iOS www.snipca.com/57306
Zedge is the best source of free ringtones and notification sounds, with millions to download. These span themes, occasions, musical genres and classic tones. There's also a new AI Ringtones Generator. Pay 99p per week or a one-off fee of £11.49 to remove ads and unlock extra features.
Best For Customising your ringtone

X Icon Changer

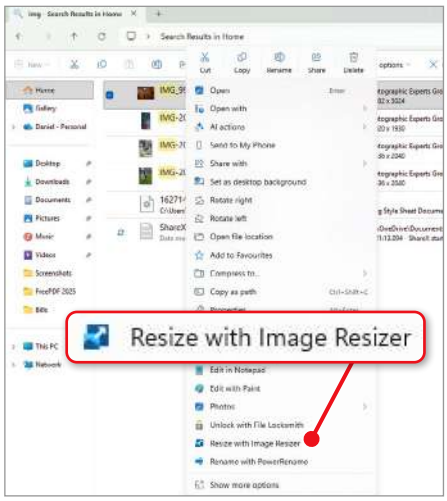
Free*
Android www.snipca.com/57312
iOS www.snipca.com/57313
This app lets you change the name and icon of any app on your phone or tablet. Choose from its library of designs or use your own photos. Although Android adds a watermark to customised app icons, you can remove this by dragging X Icon Changer's widget to your home screen. Pay £1.99 to remove the frequent ads.
Best For Customising app icons

*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 10

Use Image Resizer again in PowerToys

Microsoft has brought back the Image Resizer tool for Windows 10. It was removed in version 0.96, released on 19 November, but was reinstated a week later with the small update 0.96.1. It lets you right-click image files in File Explorer and resize them quickly without opening a separate program (see screenshot below). If you already have PowerToys installed, you'll be prompted to update to version 0.96.1 when you next open it. If you don't have it installed, download it from www.snipca.com/56718.

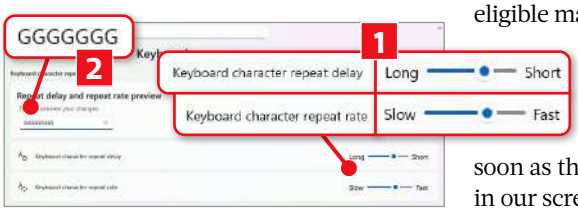


WINDOWS 11

Set how quickly repeated characters appear

Microsoft has added new options for setting how quickly characters appear when you press down a key. These can be handy for people with accessibility issues who need slower repeat rates or longer delays to avoid unintended repeats, and gamers who want faster key presses for actions.

Press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click 'Bluetooth & devices' followed by Keyboard. Now move the 'Keyboard character repeat delay' and 'Keyboard character repeat rate' sliders (1 in our screenshot below) – the first is the amount of time you must hold down a key before it starts repeating, while the second is how fast the character then repeats.



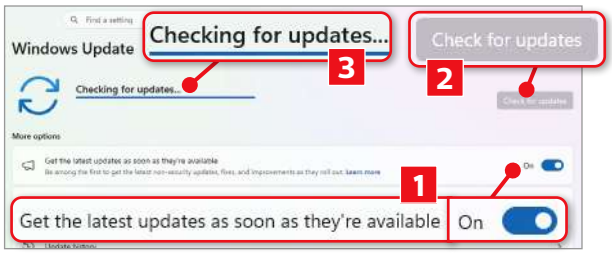
Now press down a key in the box above 2 and adjust the sliders until it matches the speed you want. These settings were previously available in the Keyboard Properties section of the Control Panel.

WINDOWS 11

Install build 25H2

Microsoft has made Windows 11 25H2 available to all computers, having first released it only to eligible machines at the end of September.

To get it, press Windows key+I to open Settings then click Windows Update and make sure 'Get the latest updates as soon as they're available' is turned on (1 in our screenshot above right). Now click 'Check for updates' 2 and Microsoft will check whether you have any to install 3. If it finds the 25H2 update, follow the instructions to download and install it.



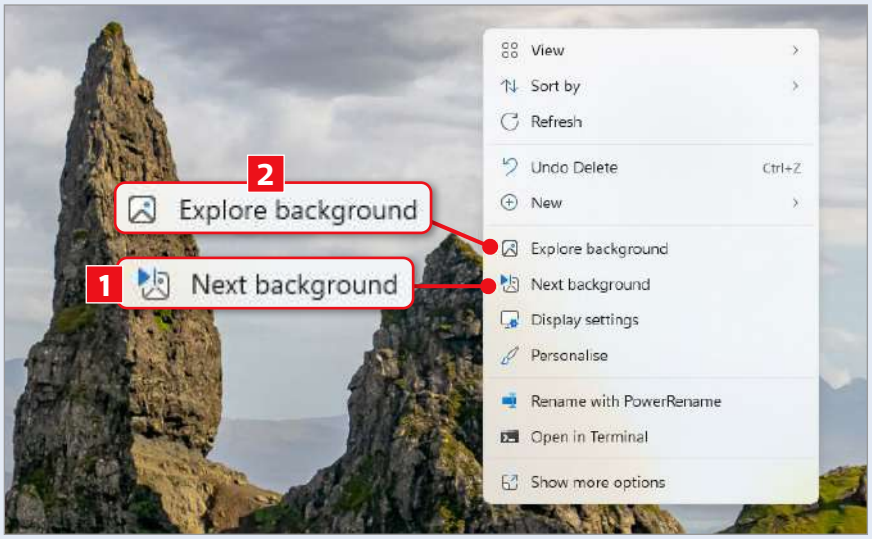
If you don't see the option to install 25H2, you might already be running it. Find out by typing about into the Windows search bar, clicking Open, then scrolling down to the 'Windows specifications' box and checking your 'Version'. There are no major new features in 25H2, but it does contain minor background fixes that make Windows 11 run more smoothly.

WINDOWS 11

Flick through forthcoming Spotlight photos

If you have Windows Spotlight turned on Microsoft will show you a different landscape or wildlife photo on your desktop and lock screen every day. To see these, press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click Personalisation on the left followed by Background. Next choose 'Windows spotlight' in the 'Personalise your background' dropdown menu.

Microsoft recently added the option to flick through the next few Spotlight images coming up and switch to one. To do this, right-click your desktop then select 'Next background' (1 in our screenshot). When we tested this it showed the next three upcoming photos from Spotlight. Clicking 'Explore background' 2 opens Microsoft's search engine Bing showing information about the image (it's the Old Man of Storr on the Isle of Skye).

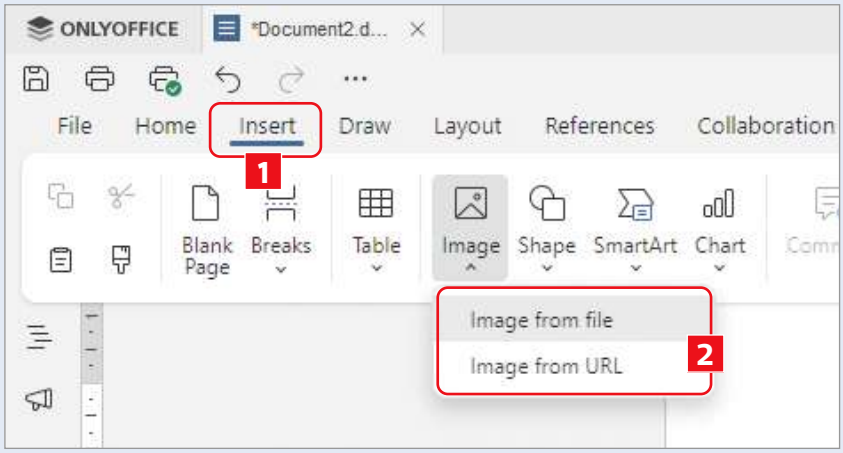


ONLYOFFICE

Import photos in HEIF and HEIC formats

OnlyOffice 9.1.0, released in mid-October, added support for the HEIF photo format, which some Android phones use. HEIF support also covers HEIC, which is what Apple's iPhones use by default for photos. This means you can insert photos saved on smartphones in either format into any OnlyOffice tool without first converting them to JPEG or PNG.

To do this, click Insert (1 in our screenshot) then Image and select either 'Image from file' (if the picture is saved on your computer) or 'Image from URL' (if it's saved online) 2.

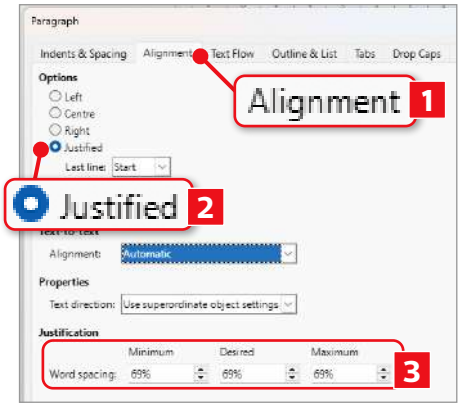


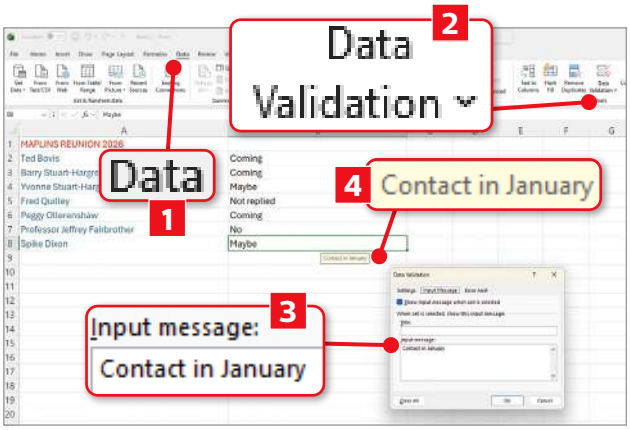
LIBREOFFICE WRITER

Adjust how your justified text looks

Justifying your text makes multi-column or print-style layouts look neater. Version 25.8 of LibreOffice Writer, released in August, lets you set how loose or tight your justified text appears, improving the overall look of your document.

Click 'Format' at the top, then Paragraph followed by the Alignment tab (1 in our screenshot below). Now select Justified 2 and under the Justification heading select a 'Word spacing' percentage in the Minimum, Desired and Maximum menus 3. Click OK to confirm. Respectively these set the smallest, most ideal and widest gaps between your words when spreading text across a line. It keeps paragraphs looking neat by reducing ugly stretched spaces and cutting down on unnecessary hyphens.





MICROSOFT EXCEL

Add messages to spreadsheet cells

You can add messages that appear when a spreadsheet cell is clicked. These can act as reminders for you or others you share the spreadsheet with.

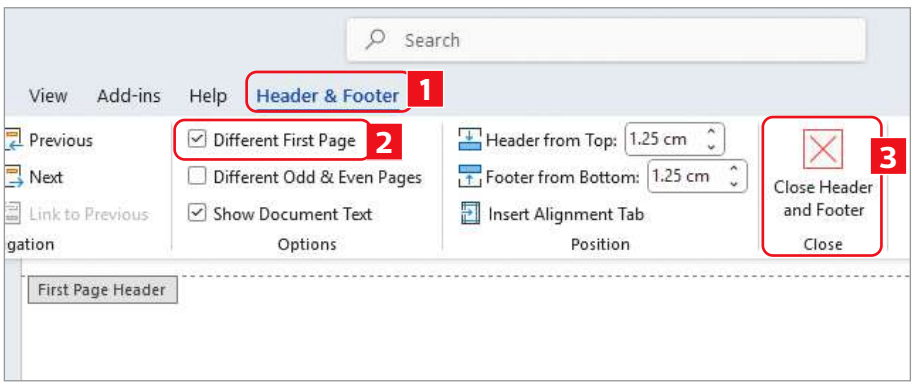
First, click to highlight the relevant cell, then click Data at the top (1 in our screenshot above) followed by the Data Validation dropdown menu 2 then the Data Validation option that appears. Now click the Input Message tab and write your message in the 'Input message' box 3. Click OK. Now click the cell in your spreadsheet and the message will appear 4.

MICROSOFT WORD

Skip numbering first page of your document

Sometimes the first page of your document is a title page, cover sheet or introduction, and you don't want it to show a page number. Word lets you skip numbering the first page while continuing the count from the second page.

Double-click in the header then 'Header & Footer' at the top (1 in our screenshot below). Now tick Different First Page 2 then click the 'Close Header and Footer' button 3. This will remove 1 from the first page, and your document will start being numbered from your second page.

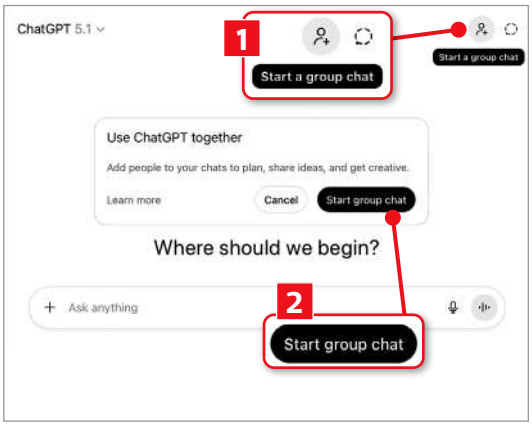


In The Club

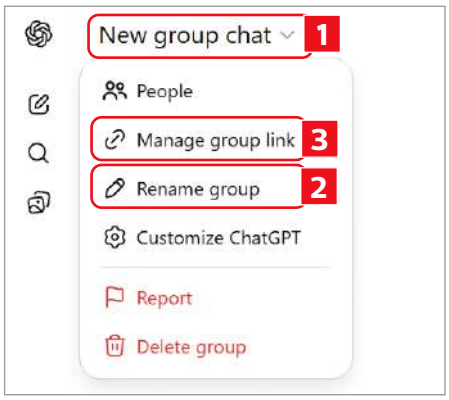
Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Use ChatGPT's group chat to collaborate

When you're planning club business – whether it's organising an event, comparing venue options or simply managing day-to-day tasks – collaboration with other members is often essential. But have you ever found yourself wishing there was someone in the group who could instantly look things up, check facts or pull together ideas while you all chat? If so, ChatGPT's new 'group chat' tool could provide an innovative solution.



Open ChatGPT then click 'Start a group chat'...



...then give your group a name and create a link you can share

It works a bit like a WhatsApp group, but with one extra (and very helpful) participant: ChatGPT itself. You and your fellow club members can chat normally, but whenever you need help, you can simply tag ChatGPT to ask it a question. It can look up venues for club events, rewrite your meeting notes, compare budget options, help draft your club newsletter, or answer practical questions instantly.

Importantly, ChatGPT won't interrupt or dominate your chat – it only joins in when asked. All your other private ChatGPT conversations remain completely separate and group-chat members won't be able see anything you've asked ChatGPT elsewhere.

Name your group and create a link

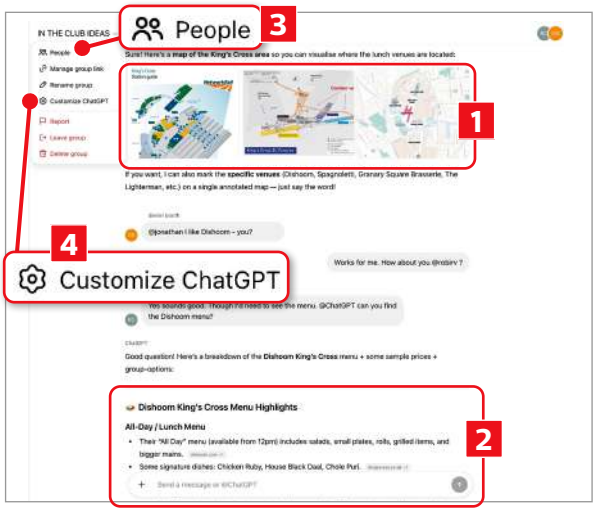
Group chat is currently available on the ChatGPT mobile apps (Android and iOS) and via the ChatGPT website, though at the time of writing it hasn't yet rolled out to the desktop tool. We'll be using the web version in this guide.

Every participant needs their own ChatGPT account, but you only need a free plan to use the group-chat feature. Bear in mind that free users are subject to the usual limitations, including slower responses during peak times and a limit to how many queries you can put to ChatGPT in quick succession.

To create a group chat, log in at https://chatgpt.com and click the top-right 'Start a Group Chat' icon (1 in our screenshot above), then click 'Start group chat' 2. You'll be presented with a link for your group, but you can ignore this for now – click Cancel. Instead, click 'New group chat' at the top left (1 in our screenshot above right) and select 'Rename group' 2. Type a meaningful name and click Rename. To invite members, click the new chat name and select 'Manage group link' 3. You'll see a long link to your chat. Click 'Copy' and paste the link into an email or message and send to the people you want to invite.

Set how ChatGPT behaves

Using ChatGPT group chat works just like any other messaging app – type what you want to say in the 'Send a message' box and press Enter on your keyboard to post it. Whenever you want to speak directly to ChatGPT, just type @ChatGPT, followed by your question or request, and it will reply in the thread.



ChatGPT suggested restaurants for our Christmas lunch and showed us menus

ChatGPT group chat is ideal for collaborative planning. As you can see from our screenshot below left, we used it to help organise the *Computeractive* Christmas party, asking @ChatGPT to suggest restaurants within walking distance of our offices, complete with maps 1, menus 2 and estimated prices. It even designed a flyer we could send around to the team.

You can add or remove members to the group at any time by clicking the chat's name and selecting People 3. Click the chat's name and select the Customize ChatGPT setting 4 to tailor how ChatGPT behaves in the chat – for example, whether it keeps answers concise, uses a formal tone or remembers key club details you've provided.

If you're chatting elsewhere in ChatGPT and someone posts in your group, you'll receive a notification. Clicking the alert takes you straight back to the group chat.

Next issue: Convert slides into videos with Google Vids

What's All the Fuss About...

Clankers

Be careful how you use this insult – robots have a long memory

What are they?

It's an insult used to describe AI tools and robots that don't perform as well as intended. It's become increasingly popular online in 2025, as people question whether technology is heading in the right direction amid a growing AI backlash.

So definitely nothing to do with Clangers then?

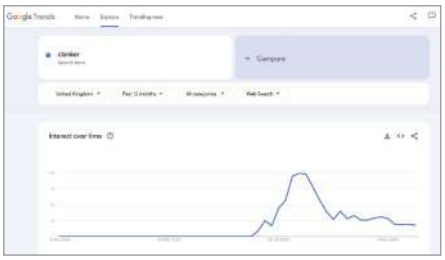
No, they remain as adorable as when Oliver Postgate first invited us to meet them in the late 1960s. By contrast, clankers are chatbots that always give you incorrect answers; AI tools that clutter your browser and desktop; and domestic robots that frequently malfunction.

I get the AI frustration, but do people really use domestic robots?

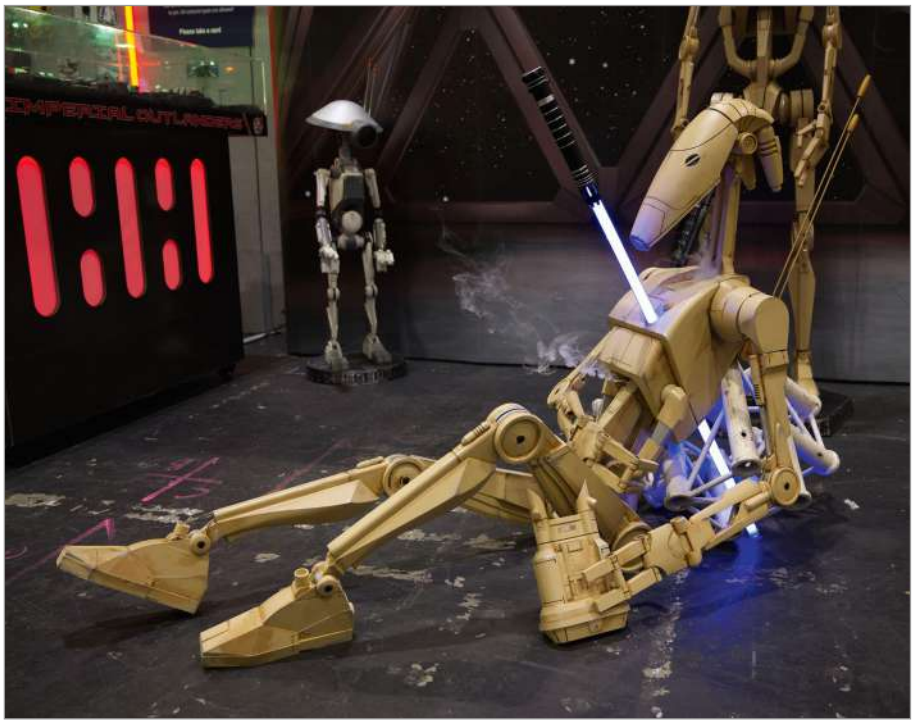
Well, not the humanoid kind that can perform household chores. But a clanker can be a robot hoover that gets wedged under your sofa, a robot lawnmower that repeatedly crashes into the same tree, or even just smart speakers that can't understand a word you say.

Where does the word come from?

It dates back to 1958 when science-fiction author William Tenn used it to describe robots from films like *Metropolis*. But its recent popularity stems from the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, where characters use it to describe battle droids, which are notoriously noisy and clumsy (this video captures every use of the word: www.snipca.com/57408). Our main image shows one that's just come off worst after an argument with a lightsabre.



Academics say "clanker" might be deemed offensive, but it's not stopping people using it



Is it meant to be rude?

Well, it certainly sounds similar to another rude word that we shan't print. And some academics say we shouldn't use it because being rude to AI and robots makes it more acceptable to be disrespectful to humans.

Wait, really?

Yep. Here's Dr Eleanor Vance, a sociolinguist at the University of Oxford: "Using a slur like 'Clanker' creates psychological distance, making it easier to dismiss, mistrust, or even justify poor treatment of non-human entities. We've seen this pattern throughout history with other marginalised groups."

Isn't she taking it a bit too seriously?

You could say that! And anyway, such hyper-sensitivity isn't stopping people using it. Google Trends, which tracks the popularity of search terms, shows how the word has taken hold this year (www.snipca.com/57409, see screenshot left). It was even nominated by Collins Dictionaries as one of its words of the year (see www.snipca.com/57411). If people are anxious about using it, it's only because they fear robots seeking vengeance in years to come.

Again – really?

Nope, they're joking. At least, we *think* they're joking. In this short clip (www.snipca.com/57413) Jason Abbruzzese, a reporter for NBC News Digital, says he's "reticent to use the word" because he doesn't want "future robots to hear me throwing it around and think, geez, this guy's a bigot". He does laugh afterwards, albeit a little nervously. Google's AI tool Gemini certainly doesn't get the joke – back in August it said clanker is a "derogatory and potentially problematic term" (see www.snipca.com/57412).

Problematic for who?

For chatbots with an inflated sense of their own importance. At least ChatGPT sees the funny side. We asked whether it was a clanker and it said, "I don't have limbs to clank, and if someone turns me off, I don't topple over making a noise like a dropped toolbox". Very droll, but we deleted the conversation straight away. We don't want to be up against the wall when the revolution comes.

Ditch Your LAPTOP

Tablets are bigger, better and more popular than ever, so why not replace your laptop with a more portable alternative? **Robert Irvine** recommends the best devices to buy

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Browse the web more comfortably than on your phone
- View and edit photos and videos on a high-quality screen
- Work with documents and spreadsheets on the go
- Multitask by using several tablet apps simultaneously
- Choose the right specifications for your mobile computing needs
- Control your tablet using a keyboard and stylus

When the first Android tablets and iPads went on sale in 2010, some tech experts predicted they would replace PCs and laptops altogether. But as smartphones became larger and more powerful, attention was diverted from tablets and that prediction failed to come to fruition.

Things are changing, however, and we believe 2026 will be the year of the tablet. Not only are they becoming more popular – with sales up nine per cent on 2024 (www.snipca.com/57392) – but there are now more superb devices to choose from. These cater to all budgets and mobile computing requirements, and make replacing your laptop with a tablet a more viable prospect than ever before.

Tablets are no longer just big phones that can't make calls, but portable PCs with high-quality screens, sophisticated operating systems and impressive specifications. In this feature, we review the best new devices that can serve as laptop alternatives.

We've chosen tablets that went on sale in the past 12 months. That rules out Amazon's Fire HD range and Google's Pixel tablet, which haven't been updated since 2024. We also explain why you should ditch your laptop for a tablet, and recommend the best accessories to make it even easier and more comfortable to use. Don't miss out on the year of the tablet – buy your dream device today.

WHY DITCH YOUR LAPTOP FOR A TABLET?

Lighter and more portable

Although their screens are getting larger, tablets are still much lighter and more easily portable than laptops. A 10-13in tablet typically weighs 450-700g, while laptops weigh 1.4-2.3kg – around three times heavier. Even the new Samsung Galaxy S11 Ultra tablet (www.snipca.com/57321, pictured below), which has a huge 14.6in screen, weighs only 694g.

Coupled with their slim builds, that lightness makes them easier than a laptop to slip into a bag and take on a train or plane – or to a coffee shop or pub. They're also more comfortable to use while you're lounging on the sofa or in bed.

The Samsung Galaxy S11 Ultra has a huge screen but is still light

Cheaper than laptops

High-end tablets such as the iPad Pro may cost over £1,000, but – as we'll explain – you can buy a powerful device for less than £500. That's cheaper than most laptops with similar specifications.

As we mentioned in our 'Beat 2026's price rises' feature in Issue 725 (page 60), the soaring cost of RAM will increase laptop prices in 2026, but tablets – which generally use low-power DDR (LPDDR) memory – are less likely to be affected.

Longer battery life

With lighter operating systems and more energy-efficient processors, tablets last a lot longer between charges. The average battery life of a tablet is 10 to 14 hours, while for a laptop it's six to 10.

Tablets use less power while on standby, and charge faster over USB-C. Some models, including the Plus versions of Amazon's Fire HD tablets, even offer wireless charging – see picture (above right) of an Amazon Fire HD 8 Plus on an Angreat wireless-charging dock (£36 from www.snipca.com/57331).

The Amazon Fire HD 8 Plus tablet offers wireless charging

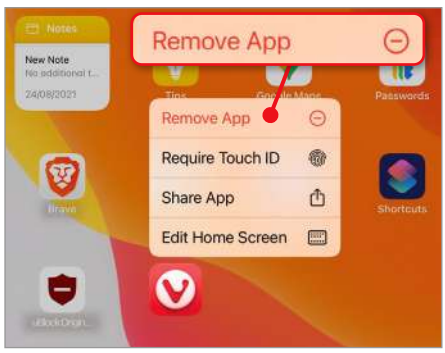
Faster to load and use

Tablets boot in seconds rather than minutes, with no waiting for a BIOS or UEFI to load or background processes to complete. Mobile apps launch much more quickly than desktop programs, and you can navigate them faster by tapping and swiping, rather than clicking and scrolling.

Unlike laptops, tablets won't slow down while background updates and antivirus scans consume RAM and processor power. And because they automatically manage app caches and temporary files, their performance isn't affected by accumulated junk.

Easier to uninstall apps

Uninstalling an unwanted app from a tablet is as simple as long-pressing its icon on the homescreen and choosing Remove or Remove App (see screenshot below). On a laptop, you need to go through Windows Settings or use a dedicated uninstaller, and sometimes wait several minutes for the program to uninstall. You may even need to reboot your system to complete the process.



It's easy to remove unwanted apps from iPads and other tablets

More secure and stable

Because mobile apps are sandboxed, it's harder for a malicious app to infect other apps and areas of the tablet's operating system. Manufacturers regularly release security and software updates, and most apps are backward-compatible so the most up-to-date versions work on older devices.

Better for creative tasks

Touchscreens, especially when paired with a stylus, make creative tasks such as editing photos and videos, sketching and painting, and scribbling notes and doodles much easier than with a keyboard and mouse. They're also great for practical tasks like annotating PDFs and signing forms.

Unlike laptops, tablet screens can switch instantly from vertical to horizontal, depending on what you're doing or watching. You can also attach a keyboard if you want to interact with your tablet in a more laptop-like way (see page 56).

Increased power and capabilities

The latest tablets dispel the misconception that they can't compete with laptops for performance and capacity. They use ARM-based processors, including Apple's A-Series and Qualcomm's Snapdragon 8-series, which rival the performance of Intel and AMD laptop chips.

A few years ago, most tablets had only 2GB of RAM, but many now have 8GB or even 16GB. And storage has increased too, from 32GB to 256GB or more in high-end models – the same as many laptop SSDs.

We'll look at the specifications of individual tablets over the next few pages.

BEST BUDGET TABLETS: UNDER £200

Budget tablets aren't meant to replace laptops for creative and work-related purposes, but they let you perform everyday tasks away from your PC and on a larger screen than your phone's. They offer a compact and comfortable way to browse the web, send emails, stream videos, use social media and read ebooks, though they lack the high performance and quality of more expensive devices.

Look for a tablet with at least 4GB of RAM, 64GB of storage and a 2.2GHz or faster processor, and don't accept less than an HD (1280x720) screen. Most new budget devices have stereo speakers and support Bluetooth 5 or higher for connecting wireless headphones.

The Samsung Galaxy Tab A11 is small in size but big in value

GOLD AWARD

Samsung Galaxy Tab A11

£99 from www.snipca.com/57332

Samsung Galaxy Tab tablets usually cost at least £500, so this new budget model (pictured above right) – the successor to the popular A9 – is an amazing bargain. Although it won't replace your laptop like the higher-end devices we'll review later, it's ideal for browsing, streaming and messaging on the go.

Its 8.7in screen is small by the standards of modern tablets, but it has a refresh rate of 90Hz, which is rare at this price. It makes swiping through web pages and apps, watching videos and playing games much smoother than on rival budget tablets, though the screen resolution is only 1340x800 pixels.

Weighing just 335g, the Samsung Galaxy Tab A11 offers 64GB of storage and 4GB of RAM, but you can double those amounts by paying an extra £20 for the 128GB model. Storage can be expanded to 2TB with a microSD card. It's powered by a Helio G99 processor, which is fine for everyday tasks, and like most cheap tablets uses Wi-Fi 5 and Bluetooth 5.3. It includes a headphone socket for wired listening and Dolby Atmos speakers for high-quality sound.

The 8-megapixel rear camera and 5-megapixel front camera are of reasonable quality, and battery life is around 13 hours for continuous video playback, which is impressive for a device of this size and price. On the downside, it supports only 15W-charging so you'll need to be patient when recharging.

Samsung offers a generous seven years of software and security updates, which adds to the value of this smart little tablet.

SILVER AWARD

OnePlus Pad Lite

£169 from www.snipca.com/56982

The OnePlus Pad Lite (pictured below) has several advantages over the Samsung Galaxy Tab A11, if you're happy to spend £70 more. It has a larger, 11in screen with a higher resolution (1920x1280 pixels), making it even better for watching films and TV programmes.

The tablet also has a slightly faster processor (Helio G100) and more RAM (6GB) than the Galaxy Tab A11, giving it the edge for performance. It includes 128GB of storage, but unlike the Samsung tablet there's no microSD card slot, so you can't add more if you run out. That's unlikely to happen with everyday app use, but could be a problem if you download lots of HD videos to play offline.

We like the OnePlus Pad Lite's stylish but sturdy design, with its light-blue and water-resistant aluminium shell. However, it's noticeably heavier (530g) than the Galaxy Tab A11, which makes it less comfortable to hold vertically with one hand.

Battery life is also shorter, at around 11 hours, but it has the benefit of supporting 33W charging speeds, so you can fully recharge it much faster. Both its cameras are five-megapixel, so not ideal for taking high-quality photos.

The OnePlus Pad Lite has a large screen and a sturdy build

BRONZE AWARD

Honor Pad X7

£90 from www.snipca.com/57333

The Honor Pad X7 (pictured below) is even cheaper than the Samsung Galaxy Tab A11, and matches many of that tablet's specifications. Although it can't quite beat it for quality, its incredible battery life – 19 hours in our tests – can compete with tablets that cost five times the price.

Like our Gold Award winner, the Honor Pad X7 has an 8.7in screen with a 1340x800-pixel resolution and 90Hz refresh rate. Brightness and contrast are good, but colour accuracy could be better.

You can expand its 64GB of storage to 1TB by adding a microSD card, and it comes with 4GB of RAM. However, unlike the Galaxy Tab A11 there's no slightly more expensive version you can buy to increase those amounts. More disappointing is the Qualcomm Snapdragon 680 processor, which is older and slower than the Helio chips in our Gold and Silver Award winners.

The Honor Pad X7's compact and light (365g) build includes an 8-megapixel rear camera and 5-megapixel front camera, but there's no headphones socket, so you'll need to use a Bluetooth or USB-C pair. And though its battery life is brilliant, the tablet is limited to sluggish 10W-charging speeds.

The Honor Pad X7 offers excellent battery life at a low price

BEST MID-RANGE TABLETS: £200 – £500

The mid-range price band is the 'sweet spot' for tablets because it includes devices that feel close to a laptop in capability but won't cost you a fortune. Rather than just browse the web, watch videos and check emails, you can work with documents, spreadsheets and photos, and use the tablet's split-screen mode to display two apps side by side.

Screens are larger than on most budget tablets and have higher resolutions – some devices even have 3K displays. You also get more storage and RAM, more powerful processors and speedier internet connectivity using Wi-Fi 6, 6E or even 7, instead of Wi-Fi 5. The built-in cameras are better quality, too.

The iPad 11 is speedy and stylish and has a superb screen

GOLD AWARD

Apple iPad 11

From **£329** from www.snipca.com/54887

Also known as the A16, in reference to its new and improved processor, the 11th version of Apple's iPad (pictured above right) is the ultimate mid-range tablet. Existing iPad users will appreciate the small but significant upgrades over previous models, and Android users will find it faster, better quality and easier to use than their current tablets.

Unlike other Apple devices, the iPad 11 is excellent value for money compared with most Android devices that have similar specifications (our other award winners are notable exceptions). It comes in a choice of four colours – silver, yellow, coral pink and blue – and its chunky bezel makes the 477g tablet easy to grip.

The cheapest model includes 128GB of storage (the 256GB model costs £429 and the 512GB is £629) and 6GB of RAM. Although rival tablets at this price offer more memory, that new A16 chip ensures tasks such as web browsing, word processing, video streaming and casual gaming feel smoother than on many laptops.

The iPad 11's 11in Liquid Retina screen is a marvel to behold, with a 2360x1640-pixel resolution and superb brightness, contrast and colour accuracy. This makes it ideal for viewing photos and videos you capture with its front and back 12-megapixel cameras.

Battery life is the weakest point, generally lasting about 11 hours. While that's better than other iPads, even some budget Android tablets last longer. Thankfully, the iPad 11 recharges very quickly, taking just a couple of hours, so it remains the best choice for tablet buyers who don't want to spend more than £500.

SILVER AWARD

Lenovo Idea Tab Pro

£319 from www.snipca.com/57342

If you'd prefer an Android tablet, you won't find a better-value device than the Lenovo Idea Tab Pro (pictured below). Its specifications actually exceed the iPad 11's in a few key areas, though it's not quite as speedy or visually impressive.

Connecting a keyboard to the tablet activates Lenovo's PC mode, which turns its 12.7in screen into a desktop-style interface, making it the perfect portable substitute for a laptop. Although you'll need to buy the keyboard separately, the Idea Tab Pro comes with a stylus for writing and doodling on-screen.

Lenovo's Idea Tab Pro has impressive specs for its price

You get 128GB of storage, which you can expand with a microSD card, 8GB of RAM and an octa-core MediaTek processor. While this can't compete with the iPad 11's A16 chip, it still beats other mid-range Android tablets and capably handles demanding apps and games. These are well served by its 2944x1840-pixel IPS screen, which is as sharp as you'd expect from that resolution, if not as vibrant as an OLED. The 13-megapixel rear camera and 8-megapixel front camera are both good quality, and battery life is a mighty 18 hours.

BRONZE AWARD

Oppo Pad 3 Pro

£499 from www.snipca.com/57346

The Oppo Pad 3 Pro (pictured below) only just scrapes into our designated mid-range band, and were it not for its higher price, it would have beaten the Lenovo Idea Tab Pro to our Silver Award. Its screen is slightly smaller, at 12.1in, but has an even higher resolution (3000x2120 pixels), with the same 144Hz refresh rate.

The tiny difference in screen size also allows the solidly constructed Oppo Pad 3 Pro to undercut the Lenovo tablet's weight by 34g (586g compared with 620g). The extra £180 gets you 256GB of storage and 12GB of RAM – there's no microSD card slot, but you're unlikely to need one.

During testing, that generous memory allocation, combined with the 3.3GHz Snapdragon processor, enabled the tablet to handle video streaming and intensive gaming without any glitches. It offers the useful ability to show three apps at once, and we were able to multitask as happily as on a laptop.

With Wi-Fi 7 and an almost unbelievable two-day battery life, the Oppo Pad 3 Pro is really a cheap high-end tablet rather than an expensive mid-range device, and an appealing alternative to an iPad.

The Oppo Pad 3 Pro has an amazing screen and battery life

Computer active

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BEST HIGH-END TABLETS: OVER £500

If money is no object, high-end tablets – unsurprisingly – offer another step up in performance and quality that rivals the best laptops. Their screens are larger with higher resolutions and refresh rates, and are commonly OLED rather than TFT. This makes them better for handling photos and videos, and viewing 4K content.

Processors in high-end tablets are significantly faster and more powerful, allowing for fairly intensive multitasking. You usually get at least 12GB of RAM, and storage starts at 256GB.

These luxury devices have builds to match and support the latest standards, including Wi-Fi 7. Their accessories tend to be better quality too.

The OnePlus Pad 3 is the best Android tablet of the past year

GOLD AWARD

OnePlus Pad 3

From £509 from www.snipca.com/55302

When the OnePlus Pad 3 (pictured above right) launched last June, OnePlus said it would be the "best Android tablet of 2025", and it's hard to argue with that. It's the strongest laptop and iPad alternative we've tested in the past 12 months, which is why it's been our Buy It! recommendation (see page 30) ever since.

There are two versions of the OnePlus Pad 3 – the cheaper model has 12GB of RAM and 256GB of storage, while for £40 more you get 16GB of RAM and 512GB of storage. That matches the specifications of most new laptops, which tend to cost considerably more.

Both versions have a stunning 13.2in screen with a 3392x2400-pixel (3.4K) resolution, 144Hz refresh rate and 12bit colour depth. Unusually, the Pad 3 has a 7:5 aspect ratio, which makes it well suited to displaying three apps side by side using its Open Canvas feature, while still being comfortable to hold vertically (at 675kg, it's quite heavy).

The Pad 3 has 13- and 8-megapixel rear and front cameras, and uses Wi-Fi 7 and Bluetooth 5.4. However, its most notable feature is its processor, a Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Elite. This offers tremendous speed and power and means it can cope with any task you throw at it, from video editing to graphically intense games and AI tasks.

In our tests, the huge 12,140mAh battery-powered continuous video playback for 17 hours. It also supports super-fast 80W charging if you have a compatible charger.

For a true laptop experience, you need to buy a OnePlus keyboard (see page 56). But the power and quality of the Pad 3 mean it's still terrific value for money.

SILVER AWARD

Apple iPad Pro M5

From £999 from www.snipca.com/56870

If you're serious about ditching your laptop for a tablet, Apple's latest iPad Pro (pictured below) is the supreme (and supremely expensive) choice. Whether you choose the 11in model or splash out £300 more for the 13in version, you won't find a faster, more powerful and higher-quality device.

The nine-core M5 processor in the new iPad Pro is 15-per-cent quicker than its predecessor at tasks such as 4K video editing and AI content generation through its NPU. In benchmark speed tests, the iPad Pro thrashes the competition.

The OLED screen is astonishingly crisp and vibrant, though at 2420x1668 pixels is not as high resolution as the OnePlus Pad 3. The front and rear cameras are both 12-megapixel, so you can capture 4K photos and 60fps videos, and save them to the 256GB of storage. If you need more space, 512GB, 1TB and 2TB models are available, but cost considerably more – up to £2,229 for the 13in version. The pricier versions also boost the RAM from 12GB to 16GB.

With Wi-Fi 7 and Bluetooth 6, the iPad Pro M5 future-proofs your connectivity needs, though its battery life (about 15 hours for video playback) is less than other high-end tablets.

The iPad Pro M5 has astonishing power, but it's not cheap

BRONZE AWARD

Microsoft Surface Pro 12in

From £759 from www.snipca.com/55142

All the tablets we've reviewed in this feature are Android or iPadOS, but if you'd prefer to use Windows – only in tablet form rather than laptop – buy the latest Microsoft Surface Pro (pictured below). This costs nearly £300 less than previous versions to compete with Apple's iPad Air (priced from £799).

It's powered by an eight-core Qualcomm Snapdragon X Plus processor and has 16GB of RAM (double the iPad Air's) and a 256GB SSD. Windows 11 performance is smooth and you can have multiple apps and windows open simultaneously with no noticeable slowdown. Note that the Surface Pro is ARM-based so not all programs will run properly.

The 12in screen has a 2194x1464-pixel resolution and 90Hz refresh rate, which pales in comparison to our other award winners, but is still bright and sharp, with accurate colours. It has a 1080p front webcam and 10-megapixel rear camera, and supports Wi-Fi 7 and Bluetooth 5.4.

While the touchscreen is smooth and responsive, you can use the Surface Pro like a laptop by buying its £150 keyboard. Battery life is an iPad-beating 18 hours, but annoyingly it doesn't come with a wall charger – only a USB-C cable.

The Surface Pro provides a Windows 11 experience on a tablet

BEST ACCESSORIES FOR TABLETS

To use your tablet as an authentic laptop alternative and not just a big phone, you should buy at least one accessory. Although this adds to the cost overall (unless you're lucky enough to get a bundled freebie), it will make both everyday and specialist tasks easier, faster and more comfortable. Here are the best accessories to buy.

Use this Bluetooth keyboard with the Samsung Galaxy Tab A11

KEYBOARDS

Typing on a touchscreen is fine for short messages, social-media posts and filling in forms, but not ideal for writing documents, working with spreadsheets and other tasks that require quick and accurate text entry. Attaching a keyboard lets you type faster, for longer and with more precision, and gives you the tactile satisfaction of pressing physical keys.

There are several types of tablet keyboard. Folio keyboards are integrated in a protective case that folds over the tablet like a book cover. Some can be detached from the case and connected to the tablet using magnets.

There are Bluetooth keyboards that connect wirelessly, and keyboard docks that turn your tablet into a small, fixed-screen laptop. Some devices also have trackpads, backlit keys and stands. Here we outline the official keyboards for our three Gold Award winners.

Samsung Keyboard Trio 500

£39 from www.snipca.com/57362

This basic Bluetooth keyboard (pictured above right) pairs with the Samsung Galaxy Tab A11, so you can control the tablet wirelessly at home or on the go. You can assign custom hotkeys to your favourite apps and, on larger Samsung tablets, use the DeX mode to make the screen more desktop-like, with multiple windows.

Apple's Magic Keyboard Folio is expensive but great quality

Magic Keyboard Folio

£249 from www.snipca.com/57367

Apple's detachable and magnetic folio keyboard (pictured below left) for the iPad 11 (A16) is characteristically pricey but excellent quality. In addition to comfortably large keys and a 14-button row, it includes a click-anywhere trackpad that controls the on-screen cursor and supports multi-touch gestures, and has an adjustable stand.

OnePlus Pad 3 QWERTY Smart Keyboard

£169 from www.snipca.com/57368

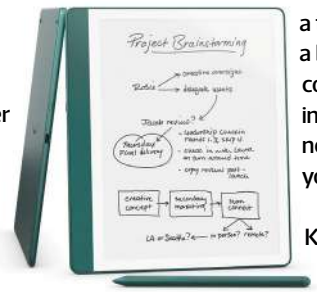
Connect this keyboard (pictured below) magnetically to your OnePlus Pad 3 to turn it into a mini laptop and type confidently on its 'sculpted keycaps'. It has a trackpad and adjustable stand, plus an AI button for interacting with Google Gemini. Note that it doesn't have a battery or Bluetooth in the UK and Europe.

If the manufacturer's own keyboard is too expensive, save money by buying a third-party device. There are loads on Amazon for as cheap as £10, such as this EasyAcc Bluetooth keyboard:

This keyboard turns your OnePlus tablet into a mini laptop

Take notes on a digital-paper tablet

If you'll mainly use a tablet for taking notes, writing documents and annotating PDFs, an E-Ink 'digital-paper tablet' may better suit your needs. These touchscreen devices bridge the gap between e-readers and tablets, and make it easy to read and write on the go.



The Kindle Scribe is the most popular paper tablet, though it's not cheap, costing from £380 for the 16GB model (www.snipca.com/57380, pictured). It comes with a Premium Pen stylus you can use to write on its 10.2in, 300dpi screen as smoothly as you would on paper. It has a three-week battery life, a built-in notebook that converts your scribbles into text and lets you make notes on the ebooks you're reading.

A colour version, the Kindle Scribe Colorsoft went on sale in December priced from £570 (www.snipca.com/57381).

Alternatively, the reMarkable Paper Pro Move, which we reviewed in Issue 720 (page 29) has a 7.3in colour screen, 64GB of storage and two-week battery life. It costs £399 and comes with a standard Marker stylus (www.snipca.com/56425).

www.snipca.com/57369. Just make sure the keyboard will work with your make and model of tablet.

STYLUSES

Touchscreens are great for tapping and swiping, but a stylus lets you be far more precise and makes your tablet even more versatile than a laptop. It's perfect for drawing, annotating PDFs and editing photos, and much better than your finger for taking notes and signing forms.

Many tablets now support pressure sensitivity and palm rejection (so you can rest your hand on the screen while writing), which makes using a stylus very close to a pen-and-paper experience. It's also useful for selecting text in documents and data in spreadsheets.

Aside from Samsung's budget tablet (which doesn't support the company's S Pen) and the Oppo Pad 3 Pro, all the devices we've reviewed in this feature have official styluses. However, only the Lenovo Idea Tab Pro comes with one – the Tab Pen Plus.

These styluses include the Honor Magic Pen (£80 from www.snipca.com/57370, pictured below); the OnePlus Stylo 2 (£99 from www.snipca.com/57371); and the Microsoft Surface Pen (£90 from www.snipca.com/57372). Apple has a USB-C Pencil and a wireless Pro version, priced £79 and £129 respectively (www.snipca.com/57373).

You can buy a cheap third-party stylus for your tablet, such as a Meko pen (from £7 from www.snipca.com/57391), to perform basic writing and navigation tasks. But it won't offer the same accuracy and features as the tablet manufacturer's own device.

Make notes on the Honor Pad X7 using its Magic Pen stylus

Should you buy a foldable device?

Foldable phones are powerful and portable alternatives to tablets and laptops. Their compact designs let you carry them in your pocket like a smartphone, while their fold-out screens let you browse web pages, view videos, edit photos and work with documents and spreadsheets.

The catch is that foldable phones are very expensive. Samsung's Galaxy Z Fold7 costs from £1,799 for the 12GB of storage model (www.snipca.com/57388, pictured), though you get a lot of bang for your buck.

Its 1968x2184-pixel internal screen folds out to 8in, it's powered by a Snapdragon 8 Elite processor and one of its three cameras has an incredible 200 megapixels.

A comparatively cheaper option is the Honor Magic V5 (£1,400 from www.snipca.com/57390). This has an even higher quality foldable screen (2440x2240 pixels) and 16GB of storage, though as with the Samsung phone you need to buy a stylus separately.

Note that the hinges on foldable phones make them more fragile than traditional phones and tablets, and not all apps are optimised for a foldable screen layout.

Connect multiple devices to your tablet with a Ugreen USB hub

USB-C DOCKS

One hindrance to using a tablet like a laptop is the lack of ports for connecting other devices. Most tablets have a single USB-C port, which is mainly used by their chargers.

Buy a USB dock to get extra ports and a more desktop-style computing experience. This will let you connect a wired mouse, USB stick and external hard drive, and transfer files to and from the tablet more quickly than using Bluetooth or Wi-Fi. Some docking stations also double as tablet stands, so you won't need to prop up your device while working or watching videos.

Ugreen makes a variety of affordable USB hubs, including the Revodok 1071 (£16 from www.snipca.com/57378, pictured above). This has two USB-C and two USB-A ports, plus an HDMI port for connecting your tablet to a monitor or TV, and a memory-card reader for additional storage.

For a docking station with a stand, we recommend Plugable's 8-in-1 USB-C hub (£40 from www.snipca.com/57379). This provides HDMI and USB 3.0 ports, memory card slots and an audio jack in the base of an easy-to-adjust stand that fits any new Android or Windows tablet, or iPad. ca

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1 Wintoys

www.snipca.com/55189

Wintoys was by far your most-downloaded tool of 2025, rising from 12th place in 2024. This brilliant system-optimisation app (it's only available from the Microsoft Store) was updated throughout the year and made frequent appearances in our Best Free Software section.

However, it was Wintoys' inclusion in our 'Best free software you'll master in minutes' Cover Feature in Issue 713 (pictured above) that attracted the majority of your clicks. Here we praised the app's simple but feature-packed design, which saves you installing several separate PC-cleanup programs.

Wintoys' Cleanup options delete junk files, browser caches, old Windows updates and system-restore points, and its 'Fast startup' setting can speed up your boot time by 50 per cent. We particularly like its Tweaks tab (see screenshot below left), which lets you customise your desktop, Start menu and File Explorer; change your privacy settings to stop Microsoft spying on you; and disable ads in Windows 10 and 11.

With so many useful features, we're not surprised thousands of you installed Wintoys in 2025, and we eagerly await its next update in 2026.

2 Hasleo Backup Suite

www.snipca.com/53669

Genuinely free – as opposed to freemium – backup software is hard to find, so it's no wonder Hasleo Backup Suite was your second favourite program of 2025. This excellent tool is completely free to use, with no options locked behind Upgrade buttons.

Hasleo Backup Suite 5.0 was the lead program in our Best Free Software section in Issue 703, where we explained how to speed up your backups using its new backup filter (see screenshot below left). This reduces backup sizes by excluding unnecessary files, while another new option compresses your backups to make them even smaller.

It's now on version 5.5 and we also included it in our 'Best free software you'll master in minutes' Cover Feature. Hasleo Backup Suite includes extra tools for cloning Windows, creating an emergency disk and wiping drives, but you can ignore those to focus on its backups.

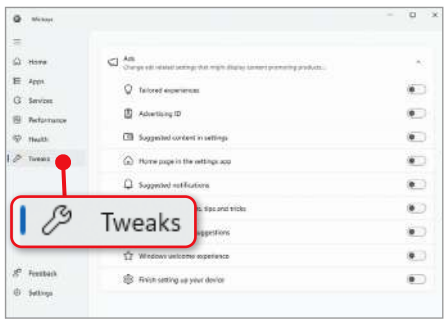
3 Flyby11/FlyOOBE

www.snipca.com/57394

When Windows 10 support ended last October, many of you were unable to upgrade to Windows 11 because your PCs didn't meet the minimum specifications. FlyOOBE (formerly known as Flyby11) offers a free, easy and clearly popular workaround that bypasses Microsoft's restrictions.

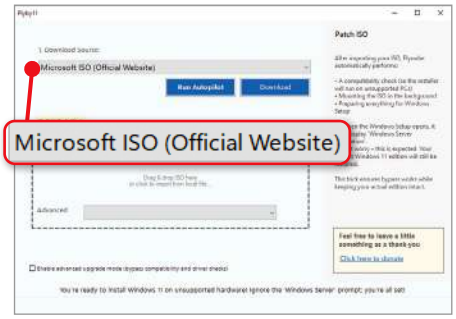
In Issue 718's Windows 10 Survival Guide (pictured right) we explained how to use FlyOOBE to install Windows 11 on unsupported PCs from an ISO file (see screenshot above right). In Issue 720 (page 38), we showed you how it can also remove bloatware from Windows 11.

FlyOOBE was frequently updated in 2025 to ensure it still worked after

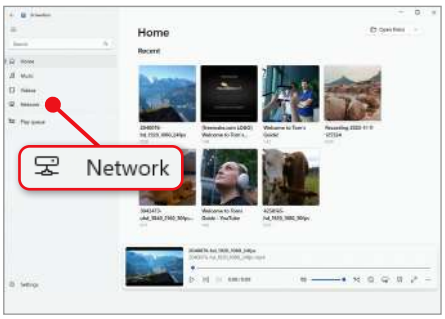


Wintoys' many useful tweaks made it your favourite program of 2025

Hasleo Backup Suite's new backup filter speeds up your backups



FlyOOBE bypasses Microsoft's upgrade restrictions for Windows 11



Screenbox Media Player is a simple to use alternative to VLC

Microsoft closed some upgrade loopholes. Its developer certainly kept us busy by changing its name, design and capabilities, separating it into upgrade and debloating tools, then reintegrating them. Watch out for fake versions – see 'Named & Shamed' in Issue 723.

4 PhotoDemon

www.snipca.com/55086

The free image editor PhotoDemon was the lead program in our Best Free Software section in Issue 712, after a major update introduced a host of new features and improvements. These included better memory management, which frees up RAM from inactive images, clearer options for enhancing photos and automatic repair of incorrect file extensions.

However, it was Photo Demon's new Crop tool that really caught our attention, and we devoted a Workshop to it in Issue 715 (page 38). The updated feature makes cropping images much easier and has the clever ability to crop outwards as well as inwards.

You obviously found it as useful as we did, gaining Photo Demon fourth place in your most-downloaded programs.

5 Screenbox Media Player

www.snipca.com/55147

Screenbox was one of our favourite discoveries of 2025, so we're pleased you also liked it enough to make it your fifth favourite tool. In Issue 713's Workshop we recommended it as a great alternative to VLC Media Player.

Although Screenbox lacks VLC's advanced features (and is a Microsoft Store app), it's based on the same code and supports nearly all audio and video formats. Its streamlined interface makes it fast and easy to use, and its Network option (see screenshot above) can stream content from a media server.

We also included Screenbox in our 'Best new software for 2026' Cover Feature in Issue 724, though we still hope VLC 4.0 will belatedly arrive soon.

6 Wise Program Uninstaller

www.snipca.com/55188

We often recommend Wise Program Uninstaller in our Best Free Software section, but it was its appearance in our 'Best free software you'll master in minutes' feature that landed it sixth place in your list. We described it as putting a friendly face on removing junk, letting you uninstall multiple programs in one go and delete leftover traces afterwards.

Wise goes further than other uninstallers by removing unwanted browser extensions too. It also has a Custom Uninstall option for deleting software that can't be removed in the usual way.

7 Sparkle

www.snipca.com/56980

PC-optimisation tool Sparkle is the newest program to make your Top 10, first appearing in our 'Best new software for 2026' feature. While it has similar features to Wintoys, it's even simpler to use and has handy unique tweaks.

Its powerful Debloat Windows script removes Windows bloatware, while other options disable Copilot, optimise your network settings and restore the full right-click menu in Windows 11. Sparkle is still in beta, but your response to the program suggests it has a bright future.

Your Top 10 in 2024

1 Glow
2 Files
3 AllDup
4 Patch My PC Home Updater
5 Any Video Converter
6 Handy Viewer
7 WizTree
8 FreeTube
9 Tor Browser
10 ValiDrive

Buy our 2025 Back Issue CD & USB Stick

You can read every feature, review and workshop referred to here on our new 2025 Back Issue CD and USB Stick. These contain searchable PDFs of all 26 issues from last year. Order them soon from www.snipca.com/57455.

8 GoAwayEdge

www.snipca.com/53576

GoAwayEdge was the most popular tool from our 'Break Windows' worst rules' Cover Feature in Issue 703 (pictured right). That indicates you're not as keen on Microsoft's browser as the company hopes.

With GoAwayEdge, you can either completely remove Edge from your PC or redirect Windows to use your preferred browser, search engine and AI tool. Curiously, the developer is now playing down the removal option, presumably to avoid being blocked by Microsoft.

9 Photo Variants/AlterPhoto

www.snipca.com/54636

The second image editor in your top 10 was called Photo Variants when we included it in Issue 709's Best Free Software section. Now named AlterPhoto, it offers lots of tools and filters for editing and enhancing your photos, in a friendlier interface than the likes of GIMP and Adobe Photoshop.

The program is especially useful for removing blemishes and other unwanted elements using its Retouch, Heal and Clone options.

10 Glow

www.snipca.com/56896

Glow is the only program from 2024's list (see box left) to make your top 10 for 2025, though it slips from first place to 10th. The versatile system-information tool was updated regularly in the second half of the year, adding lots of useful new data and options.

These include a Stuck Pixel Repair Tool for fixing defective (but not dead) pixels on your monitor. Read about Glow's latest additions on page 19. ca

Check your PC can run LINUX

Linux can give your old PC a new lease of life – but only if your hardware is compatible. **Jonathan Parkyn** explains what to check, what to avoid and what to do if things go wrong

There's mounting evidence to suggest that more people than ever are switching to Linux. Take the recent announcement from the makers of Zorin OS – the most Windows-like Linux distro – that it had been downloaded more than one million times in the past month, breaking all records (see www.snipca.com/57336).

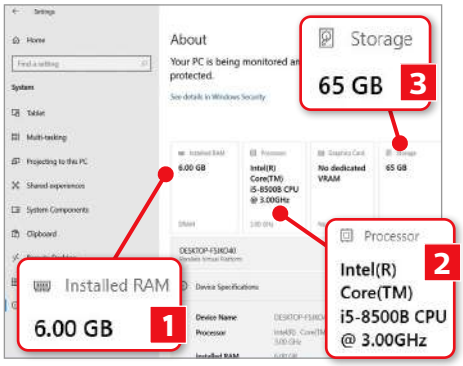
One reason people are switching to Linux is the end of Microsoft's support for Windows 10 in October, leaving millions of older PCs that can't run Windows 11 effectively obsolete. Linux gives these users a cost-free way to keep their machines usable and secure.

However, the switch to Linux isn't always without bumps in the road. Crucially, not every old PC has the horsepower (or compatible components) to run modern Linux smoothly, while errors during installation or configuration can be deeply frustrating.

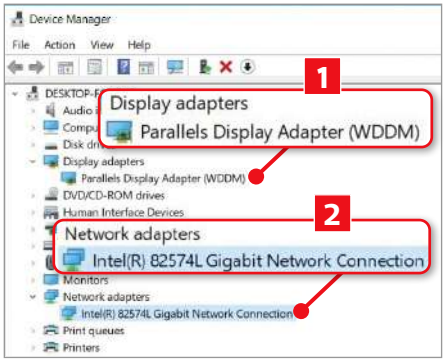
Here, we'll show you how to make sure your system can run Linux while avoiding all those common pitfalls.

Is your computer compatible with Linux?

Linux isn't a one-size-fits-all operating system. Different distros have different system requirements, and some offer better support for specific hardware than others. In some cases, your chosen distro may display errors or simply refuse to install if your hardware doesn't meet its minimum specification.



Make a note of your PC's RAM, processor model and storage capacity



Open Device Manager and note down the details of vital adapters

In other cases, you may find your computer becomes incredibly slow or that specific functions – Wi-Fi or sound, for example – don't work properly anymore.

Many of these problems can be avoided by finding information about the components that make up your PC, then choosing a distro that supports them. On Windows 10, click Start, Settings, System, then About. On this screen you'll find three key details: the amount of installed RAM (1 in our screenshot above), the processor model 2 and storage capacity 3. Make a note of these.

It's also worth opening Device Manager (right-click Start and select Device Manager) and noting down what you find under the entries for 'Display adapters' (1 in our screenshot above right), 'Network adapters' 2 and Sound.

Do you have enough RAM?

Your computer's RAM can make a significant difference to how well Linux runs on your PC. Too little and you could find yourself struggling with slow performance and software crashes.

The precise amount of RAM you'll need will depend on the distro you're running. Those with full-featured desktop PC systems such as Gnome or KDE Plasma, used by distros like Ubuntu (www.snipca.com/57382) and Fedora (www.snipca.com/57383), will need at least 4GB to 8GB RAM to keep everything responsive in everyday use.

The two distros we've previously recommended for Windows 10 switchers – Zorin OS (www.snipca.com/57384) and Linux Mint Cinnamon Edition (www.snipca.com/57385) – both quote 2GB as the minimum RAM. However, we'd recommend at least 4GB for smooth

Lubuntu is especially built to run on lower-spec computers

performance, and you'll enjoy better multitasking and faster web browsing if you have 8GB or more.

However, some Linux distros can perform well on lower-spec machines. Lightweight variants such as Lubuntu (www.snipca.com/57386, pictured above), Linux Lite (www.snipca.com/57387) and Puppy Linux (www.snipca.com/57341) can run very comfortably on 2 to 4GB of RAM, making them more suitable for older or budget Windows 10 laptops.

Do you have enough storage?

Linux typically requires less storage than Windows. Many popular distros – including Ubuntu Desktop, Linux Mint and Zorin OS – recommend between 15 to 25GB as the minimum drive space required to install and run them. However, this doesn't take into account the space you'll need for updates, programs and an efficient swap file (virtual memory used when RAM is full), let alone your own personal storage needs. Linux Mint, for example, recommends at least 100GB.

If your PC uses a small SSD or traditional hard drive, you may want to consider a stripped-back distro like Lubuntu or Puppy Linux, which can run on drives with less than 10GB capacity.

Is your processor compatible?

Almost all desktop PC and laptop processors produced in the past decade should be compatible with Linux. However, some distros specify a minimum clock speed or number of cores. Ubuntu Desktop requires at least a 2GHz dual-core processor, while Zorin OS needs a 1GHz dual-core chip or better.

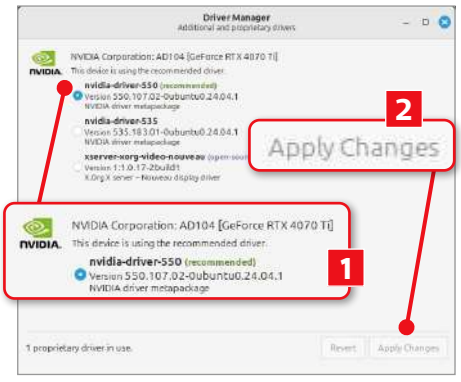
Some very old machines (typically sold before 2008) that run on 32bit processors will require a 32bit build of Linux. There aren't many of these to choose from, but we'd recommend the lightweight antiX Linux (www.snipca.com/57389).

It's unlikely your computer has an ARM processor – these were relatively rare in Windows 10 PCs. But if yours has one, you'll need to install a distro that offers an ARM-specific version, such as Ubuntu Desktop for ARM (go to www.snipca.com/57345 and scroll down to the Ubuntu 25.10 heading). Not all Linux distros offer an ARM version, though, and ARM support is currently patchy – even with an official ARM build of your chosen distro, you may find you run into driver or firmware problems.

Are your drivers compatible?

If your PC meets a distro's minimum requirements but essential PC functions don't work, it's probably down to incompatible drivers. Linux distros vary in the drivers they include by default, meaning two distros on the same PC can behave very differently. One may recognise your Wi-Fi card instantly, say, while another might fail to install the component and leave you stranded offline.

In this case, prevention is the best cure. Before you install Linux, check those notes you made about your system's hardware details – specifically the graphics, Wi-Fi and sound adapters you checked in Device Manager – and search the web to see if any Linux users have reported any problems with those same components.



Linux Mint will recommend drivers to install – select them, then click Apply Changes

With Wi-Fi, for example, Intel chipsets tend to work well on most distros. Realtek and Broadcom adapters, on the other hand, can be more hit and miss. When it comes to graphics, Nvidia hardware may require additional drivers to unlock consistent performance levels and avoid display glitches.

You should also check that the required drivers were automatically installed when you downloaded Linux. If not, you may be able to install them manually. Some more user-friendly distros, such as Ubuntu, Mint and Zorin OS, include a built-in tool – typically called Additional Drivers, Driver Manager or 'Software & Drivers' – that can identify and install any missing drivers for you.

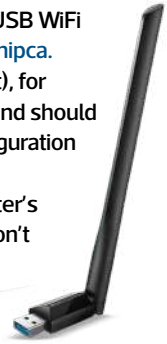
In Linux Mint, for example, click the Menu (Start) button, type driver manager and click the shortcut that appears. Enter your password when prompted and the tool will scan your hardware. You'll see a list of drivers that Mint has detected for your system. Select any recommended options (1 in our screenshot left) then click Apply Changes 2 and restart your computer.

Note that this method requires an active internet connection to download the driver. That can be a problem if the driver you're missing is for your Wi-Fi adapter – in which case, you may need to connect to your router via Ethernet.

Not all distros include an automatic driver tool. Debian and Fedora, for example, expect you to install drivers yourself from their software repository. This usually involves searching for the correct driver package in the software installer, or using a command-line tool to download and enable it. ca

Buy adapters to fix Linux problems

If your PC's internal Wi-Fi adapter refuses to work in Linux, there's one simple solution – plug in a USB Wi-Fi adapter that *does* work. TP-Link's Archer T3U AC1300 Mini USB WiFi Adapter (£15 from www.snipca.com/57348, pictured right), for example, supports Linux and should work with little or no configuration in most distros.



Likewise, if your computer's built-in audio hardware won't cooperate, a USB sound adapter or external USB speakers can bypass the problematic internal audio chipset entirely. Ugreen's USB Audio Adapter (£9 from www.snipca.com/57349, pictured right) is compatible with Linux and should work out of the box, thanks to generic USB-audio driver support.

Sadly, there's no equivalent cheap external fix for graphics problems. External graphics cards do exist, but they're usually expensive and prone to the same driver problems in Linux as built-in GPUs.

Problems Solved

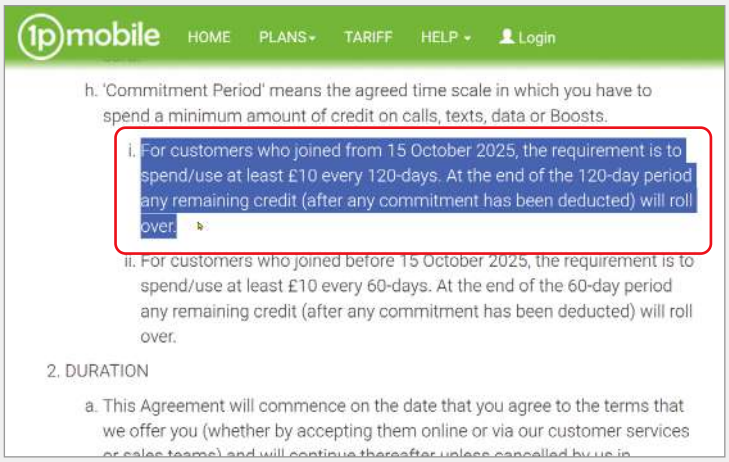
Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Are there any no-contract SIM cards?

Q Like many people, I've ditched my landline phone and now rely on my mobile. Being the belt-and-braces type, I have a second mobile phone that I want to keep as a backup for emergencies. As such, I'd like a SIM card that doesn't expire or necessitate a monthly contract. Any ideas?

John Scoote


1pmobile
HOME
PLANS
TARIFF
HELP
Login
h. 'Commitment Period' means the agreed time scale in which you have to spend a minimum amount of credit on calls, texts, data or Boosts.
i. For customers who joined from 15 October 2025, the requirement is to spend/use at least £10 every 120-days. At the end of the 120-day period any remaining credit (after any commitment has been deducted) will roll over.
ii. For customers who joined before 15 October 2025, the requirement is to spend/use at least £10 every 60-days. At the end of the 60-day period any remaining credit (after any commitment has been deducted) will roll over.
2. DURATION
a. This Agreement will commence on the date that you agree to the terms that we offer you (whether by accepting them online or via our customer services

1pMobile's PAYG plan requires you to spend at least £10 every 120 days

A Once upon a time, a 'pay as you go' (PAYG) SIM deal meant exactly that: you'd just pay for the calls or data you used, with no commitment. The provider might eventually have deactivated a SIM that hadn't been used in a while, but these 'expiry dates' tended to be measured in years. So you could put a PAYG SIM in a phone, add a bit of credit, stick it in a drawer and more or less forget all about it – until the moment you needed it.

However, since those easygoing days, almost all mobile providers have evolved the term 'PAYG' to mean the need to pay a fixed monthly fee, albeit on a 30-day rolling contract that you can cancel at any time – and that's the problem you face now.

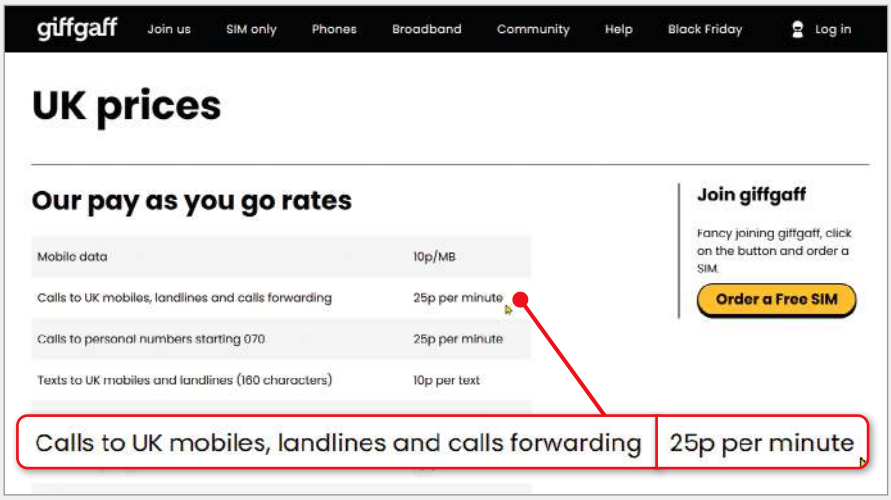
What's interesting about this question is that a quick glance at the market might convince you there's really no problem – PAYG deals abound, after all! However, while there are deals that ostensibly appear to honour the spirit of the original PAYG philosophy, few really do.

Let's explore 1pMobile's Classic PAYG plan (www.snipca.com/57093) as an example. This offers calls, messages and data at 1p per minute/text/megabyte, with top-ups at your leisure. It's a good deal for a light or occasional user. However, a closer look at the terms and conditions (www.snipca.com/57094) reveals that all is not quite as it seems. That's because 1pMobile requires customers to spend at least £10 every 120 days to keep the SIM alive. Admittedly this equates to only around £2.50/month – and remember, the plan itself really is good value – but this hidden clause does mean that the deal isn't like the original never-expiring PAYG SIMs of yore.

Fortunately, there remains at least one company that still offers a SIM that's very close to the original ideals of PAYG – albeit with two significant caveats. Order a free Giffgaff SIM (from www.snipca.com/57095) and top up with, say, a tenner, and that credit will stay there indefinitely.

However, the first warning is that the cost of calls and data is eye-watering, at 25p a minute and 10p per MB (www.giffgaff.com/pricing). So, this isn't a plan you want to be using in anything other than an emergency.

Second, and much more importantly for an emergency/backup phone, the SIM needs to be used at least once every six months to make a call or use the internet, or Giffgaff will consider it inactive – and it will be automatically deactivated. So, while your credit will never expire, the SIM itself might. In other words, if relying on it as a backup, it's vital to schedule making a call or visiting any web page at least twice a year.

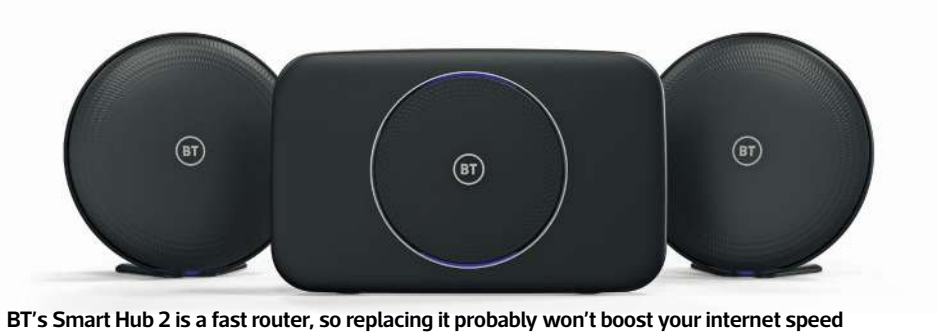


Giffgaff's PAYG contract is fine for emergencies, but call and data rates are expensive

Should I upgrade my old BT router?

Q I've been a subscriber for over a year now and look forward to each edition. I've been with BT (nowadays EE) for a long time and I'm still using the BT Smart Hub 2 router. I read all the time about new routers and their speeds. Would I get faster connections if I bought a new router, or must I stick with the BT Smart Hub 2 and connect the faster router to it somehow? Or does it entail moving to another provider? I'm 73 and trying my best to keep up but sometimes it gets a bit confusing.

Eric Street



BT's Smart Hub 2 is a fast router, so replacing it probably won't boost your internet speed

A This stuff can be confusing, not least because the answer depends on what type of broadband line you have. This in turn is because the Smart Hub 2 can act as the go-between for various technologies, from traditional ADSL to fibre – be that copper-based fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) or faster fibre to the premises (FTTP).

With that in mind, if your broadband is ADSL or FTTC then you'll either need to keep the Smart Hub 2 in the mix, or choose another router with a built-in modem that supports BT's settings – meaning one labelled as offering with ADSL/VDSL support.

On the other hand, if you have FTTP with an Openreach optical network terminal (ONT), things are simpler: that box handles the modem side, and your Smart Hub 2 just manages the Wi-Fi or Ethernet connections. You can replace it entirely with another router that supports PPPoE (most do).

In either case, swapping routers won't automatically make your broadband any faster, because the speed is ultimately limited by the BT package you pay for. A new router might give you stronger or wider Wi-Fi coverage, which could boost speeds or reliability around your home. However, the Smart Hub 2 is actually a reasonable performer, with maximum Wi-Fi 5 speeds that are at least as fast as BT's top fibre-broadband speeds.

Admittedly the figures are theoretical, and would be lower in the real world, but unless you're trying to fix particular problems with range or speed, a replacement router is unlikely to make a whole lot of difference.

How do I open my password-protected ZIP file?

Q I have a ZIP file that holds important details about my pension. I was able to open this in the past but unfortunately I've forgotten the password. Is there a way to bypass the password so I can open the file to get a printed paper version of the contents?

Rob Morrison

1
Zip Password Recovery
So cool! You've got the password.
You are using the full version now.The full version allows you to see the all character of the password.
pa******
Register

The first two letters of the password might be enough to jog your memory

2
Free Zip Password Recovery
Brute-force Attack (Try all possible combinations. It takes more time)
Brute-force with Mask Attack (Customize numbers, symbols, characters, etc.)
Dictionary Attack (Quickly find the password from inbuilt or customized dictionary)
Brute-force Attack
Start

Use Zip Password Recovery to unlock a password-protected file

A Password protection that can be bypassed wouldn't be very good protection. So, the only option is to 'crack' the code. Depending on its length and complexity this could be anything from easy to impossible.

There are numerous tools that can help, both free and commercial, and from simple to complex. The simple ones tend to be paid-for, but some let you run the cracking process, tell you if they can break the password and even reveal the first couple of characters (see screenshot 1) before asking you to cough up. The latter alone might be enough to prompt your memory, so you might not need to pay.

Thundershare's Zip Password Recovery is one such tool, and a free download from www.snipca.com/57096. Once launched, select your ZIP file then choose one of the 'attack' options. Start with the Dictionary Attack, as this will be by far the quickest – but unless your password is extremely simple, it's likely to fail. Using the brute-force attack option 2 will definitely work, but it could take hours, days, weeks, months or even years if the password is complex. Either way, click Start then keep your fingers crossed!

Why can't I watch Channel 4 abroad?

Q I use a VPN that's connected to the UK but I still can't watch Channel 4 while I'm away. I can get ITV and BBC, but Channel 4 says it's not available in my current location. Are they just better at spotting VPNs, and is there another workaround?

Joyce Young

A Channel 4 does seem to be more rigorous than other UK broadcasters in checking the location of its streaming viewers, blocking known VPN server addresses.

There are two workarounds. The first is to try switching between the available UK VPN servers (as you can do in Windscribe – see screenshot below). The selection and method varies from tool to tool but generally involves clicking the United Kingdom section before clicking a different server. Try random ones from whatever list is offered.

Alternatively, you can download Channel 4 shows before your travels as the channel does allow this (www.snipca.com/57097). Obviously this is no good for live streaming, but it will at least allow you to travel with your favourite programmes.

Try different servers in the UK to get around VPN restrictions

How do I change my Microsoft recovery email address?

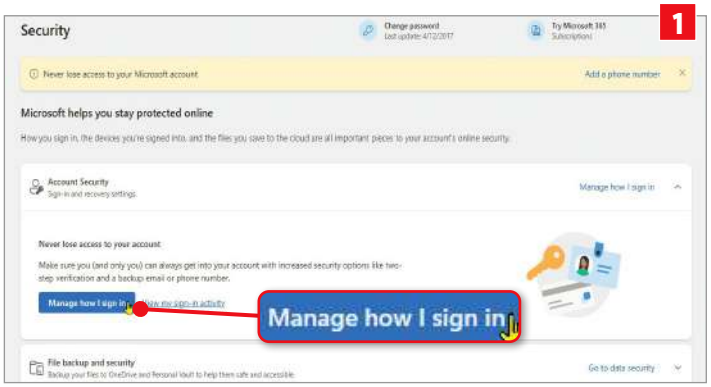
Q Microsoft recently wanted me to enter my password instead of my PIN to access Windows 11. It was then that I discovered that it wanted to send a recovery link to an old email address. I managed to get back in to my computer and decided to change my recovery email address to a current one – but I couldn't find out how. I looked at YouTube videos and explored Settings but couldn't find a clear answer.

John S Biggam

A It's very easy to get mired in this stuff because Microsoft's account management page is an inconsistent mess. It also evolves regularly, so advice that was true even a few months or weeks ago might not apply now.

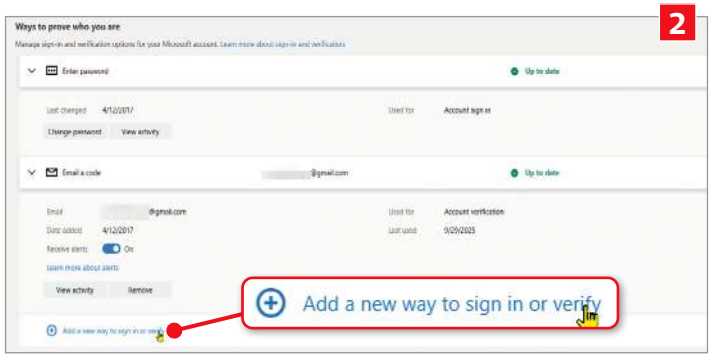
The starting point should always be the Security page of the Microsoft website, so go to https://account.microsoft.com. Currently, the 'journey' to get where you want is to click Security followed by the 'Manage how I sign in' button (see screenshot 1 below) – but remember that Microsoft likes to juggle this stuff around periodically. There, under 'Ways to prove who you are', you should see an 'Email a code' entry, and alongside that will be your outdated recovery email address. Click this entry and, to delete this old address, click the Remove button (and confirm by once more clicking Remove).

Finally, to add a new recovery email, click 'Add a new way to sign in or verify' 2 followed by 'Email a code', and then just type your updated address before clicking Next.



Go to Microsoft's account management page to change how you sign into Windows

Click 'Add a new way to sign in or verify' and enter your updated email address



Q: How do I stop phone scammers using my number?

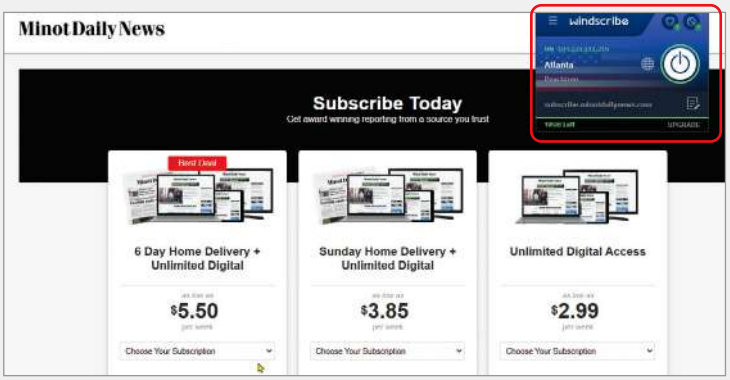
A: Issue 686, page 65 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

Why can't I subscribe to this local US newspaper site?

Q For personal reasons I want to subscribe to the *Minot Daily News* newspaper website (www.minotdailynews.com), which is based in Minot, North Dakota. However, when I click Subscribe I get a '403 ERROR' message, stating that the request could not be satisfied. It also says that Amazon CloudFront distribution is configured to block access to my country. Why should Amazon CloudFront block access to a subscription from the UK? I've approached the newspaper, and it was unaware of this block to any subscribers in the UK. Can you throw any light on this mystery?

William J Read



A free VPN such as Windscribe (inset) may let you access foreign sites

A This isn't the fault of Amazon CloudFront but the newspaper – or at least something within its technical setup.

In simple terms, CloudFront is Amazon's global content-delivery network. Millions of websites use it to make pages load quickly and securely.

Somewhere in the configuration of the *Minot Daily News* website, a rule has been set – either intentionally or inadvertently – to block visitors from outside the US.

Our guess it that this is intentional, but likely set by the title's IT team, not the editorial side, who are probably blissfully unaware of it. It might be to block spam or fraudulent sign-ups or, as noted, just an accident. The best fix is for the newspaper's web administrator to remove whatever geographical restriction has been set within CloudFront.

Alternatively, you could appear to connect from the US via a free VPN such as Windscribe (www.windscribe.com, pictured) and sign up that way. However, you'd have to enable the VPN each time you want to sign in.

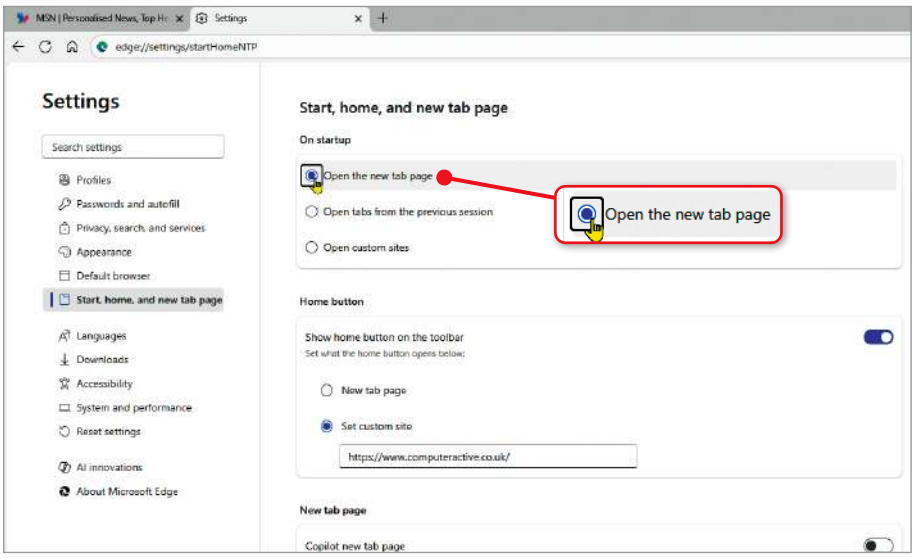
Moreover, the site might flag such sign-ins as suspicious and block them. So, really, it's something the newspaper's technical team needs to address. Therefore we'd advise getting back in touch with the *Minot Daily News* to share this broader understanding.

How can I avoid the MSN home page in Edge?

Q I'm forced to use the Edge browser for work. It generally works but my problem is the inability to set new tabs to open with a chosen site. When I open a new window, I have to navigate away from the relentless, pointless MSN home page. Can you suggest a way around this? I'm sure I speak for many teachers and other public servants, as we're often called.

For home use, I prefer Firefox and Brave. Recently I've found Teams unable to start properly in either of these. Would that be because of a Windows 11 update?

Al Hamilton



Click 'Open the new tab page' to change the website that's displayed when you open Edge

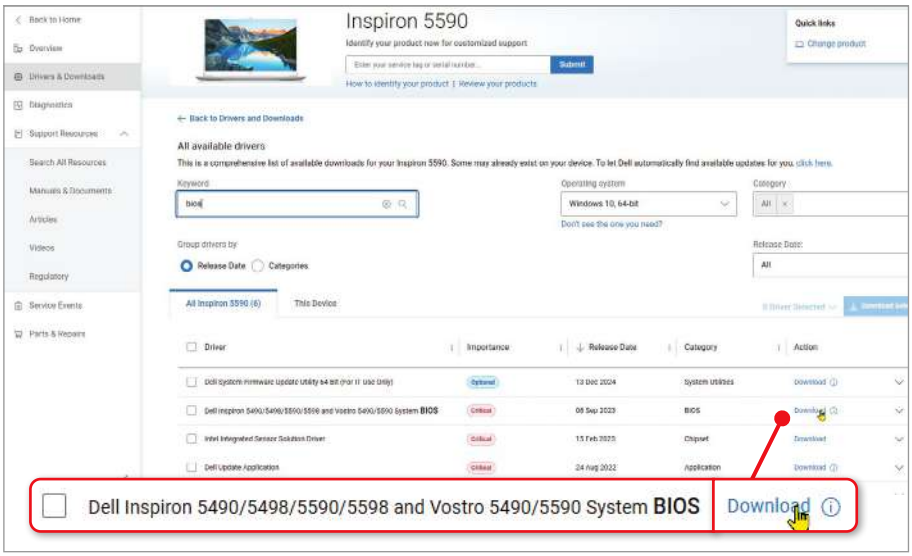
A Edge doesn't stop users from changing the website that's displayed when opening a new tab, but your employer's IT department might – for whatever random policy reason. To check, first open the Edge menu (three dots, top right) before choosing Settings. Next, on the left, click 'Start, home, and new tab page' and then see what, if any, options your admin-managed setup allows. If it's there, under 'On startup', choose 'Open the new tab page' and under 'Home button' choose 'New tab page' (see screenshot). If it's not there, check with your employer's IT team.

The same is probably true of your inability to properly use Teams in Firefox and Brave. If Edge is the 'standard issue' browser, use of your employer's portal Teams in other browsers might be disallowed.

Why can't I upgrade from Windows 10 to 11?

Q I have a Dell Inspiron 15 5000 laptop with specifications that are compatible with Windows 11. However, when I run the update it gets near the end of installing before showing a memory-management stop code, then crashing. The machine then restarts and reverts to Windows 10. I've searched online for this code and followed the instructions, but I've had no luck. I've also been to Dell's website and updated all the drivers. Any ideas?

Nigel Herring



Update the BIOS via the Dell website – but read the support page first

A You've tried a lot, so we don't have too many more ideas – but we suspect this is caused by an outdated BIOS. We know you said that all drivers have been updated, but it's easy to overlook BIOS updates, or to not think of a BIOS update as a driver. However, it's one of the most vital aspects of any computer, and it's exactly the kind of thing that can stop a Windows 11 upgrade in its tracks on otherwise compatible hardware.

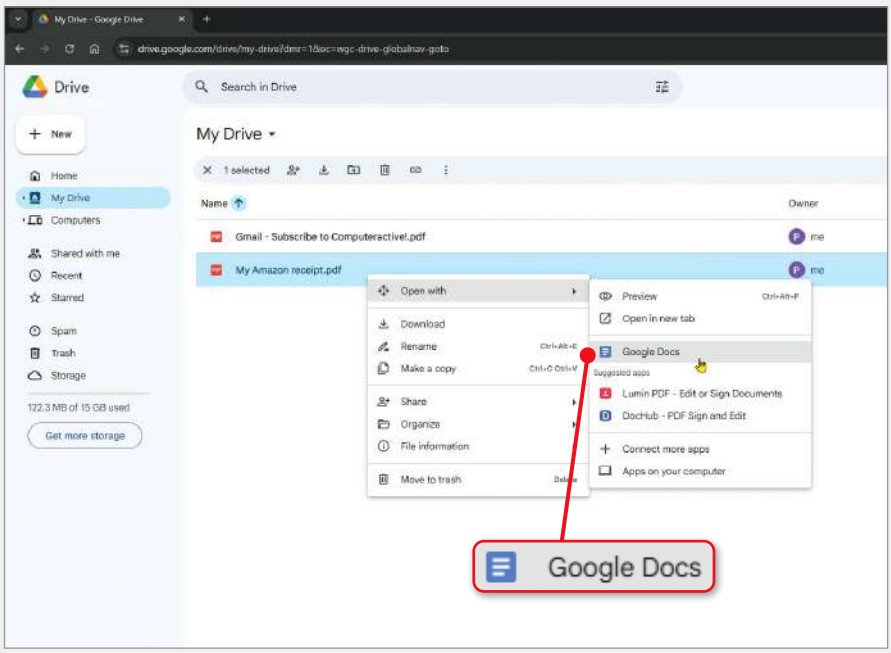
So, while we don't know your exact 5000 model, we advise returning to the Dell support website at www.dell.com/support to see what's available. Narrow down the list of drivers by typing bios, and then click the relevant Download link (see screenshot). Dell drivers are usually self-contained executable files, with a '.exe' extension – so you should be able to double-click to run the downloaded file.

However, make sure you read the support page for any instructions specific to your model, as BIOS updates should be applied with caution.

Why can't I select text in my PDF using Adobe Reader?

Q Recently, I opened a PDF in Adobe Reader and I couldn't select the text. Usually, I can just drag to select, but in this PDF this action just drew a box. I checked I wasn't going mad by opening a different PDF, and I could select the text as normal. Do you know what's going on here?

Amanda Black



Open a PDF in Google Docs to extract text into an editable document

A This means the PDF wasn't prepared as selectable text, but an image. Amazon does this when generating copies of purchase invoices, for example. So, although you can read the displayed text, to the computer it's actually an image – not selectable characters.

Paid-for versions of Adobe Reader have tools to fix that, but we can't imagine you want to pay for the privilege of selecting some text. Instead, you could upload the file to Google Drive, as this has a built-in optical character recognition (OCR) feature. To use it, just right-click the document in Google Drive, then select 'Open with' before clicking Google Docs (see screenshot). The text will be automatically extracted into an an editable document, which you can then save however you wish.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

Streaming and downloading?

Q **I'm curious whether there's any benefit to streaming or downloading content when watching. I've been told that downloading gives the best quality, but is that really true? I mostly stream everything, from Netflix and iPlayer and so on, and it all seems fine. A friend insists that downloading gives a higher bitrate. What do you think?**

Martin Jarrett

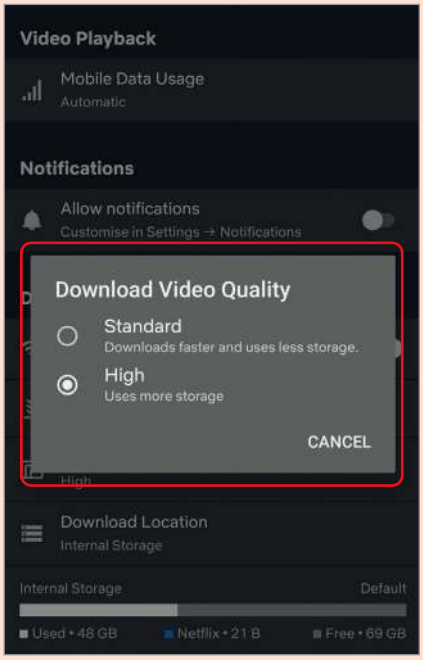
A Broadly speaking, your friend is right. All else being equal, downloads deliver the best quality because you get the full, unfettered video file. This plays straight from the device and isn't reliant on a Wi-Fi or mobile signal – the quality of which can vary.

How much this matters in the modern world is open to question, especially when factoring in the inconvenience of having to wait for things to download (or remembering to do so before heading out if you plan to watch on the move). Streaming technology has evolved a lot since the early days. All the key platforms now use what's known as adaptive bitrates, which means the quality adjusts in real time based on the speed and stability of your connection.

At home, with a reliable broadband setup, you'll rarely notice a difference because the bitrate usually stays high and consistent from start to finish. In other words, the viewing quality will be the same or only marginally below that of a downloaded version. So, in that context, downloading beforehand is typically unnecessary.

However, things are different when you're on the move. On a train or plane, or in areas with a patchy signal, a downloaded show guarantees a smooth experience without buffering or sudden drops in resolution. So while streaming is best for convenience, downloading is better when reliability is the priority.

Do note, though, that some platforms also have options to adjust the quality of downloads. In Netflix, for example, first tap My Netflix at the bottom right. Next, tap to open the menu (three horizontal lines, top right), then tap App Settings followed by Download Video Quality – and then just tap to make your choice (see screenshot).



Some streaming services let you choose the video quality of your downloads

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Can I choose precisely when to upgrade to Windows 11?

Q **My PC badgers me to upgrade to Windows 11. So far I've refused, as it's rarely convenient. I intend to upgrade but at a time of my choosing, not Microsoft's. So, can I upgrade when I want to? And second, is there a Microsoft website I can go to that will enable me to perform the upgrade in a similar manner as if I had agreed when prompted after booting up?**

Peter Burgess

A The answer to both questions is yes. You don't have to accept Microsoft's prompt to upgrade – Windows 10 will continue to work perfectly well for now. Moreover, if you sign up for what Microsoft calls Extended Security Updates (ESU), you can keep receiving security patches until at least October 2026. These are free if you use OneDrive to sync your PC settings (see www.snipca.com/57098).

Click 'Download and install' to update to Windows 11 at a time of your choosing

Second, remember that you can pause Windows updates at any time for up to 35 days. To do this, click Start followed by the Settings cog, and then Windows Update followed by 'Advanced options'. Next, under 'Pause updates', open the dropdown menu and choose a date.

When you're ready to install Windows 11, just return to the Windows Update page of Settings and then, under the Windows 11 banner, click the 'Download and install' button. If for some reason this fails, or if you truly wish to handle it manually, you can download Microsoft's free media-creation tool, from www.snipca.com/57099. This lets you create a bootable USB stick that you can use when switching on your PC to begin the Windows 11 upgrade at your own convenience.

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 14 Jan

- How do I charge my old mobile phone?
- Why won't my OneDrive auto-load?
- Do I need to defrag?

...And many more

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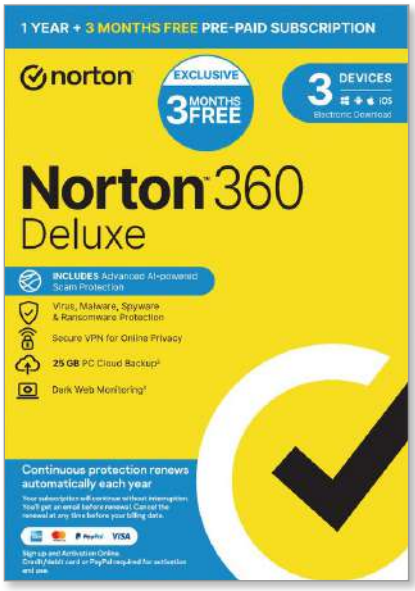

Norton is made by NortonLifeLock Inc – a standalone company dedicated to consumer cyber safety. It has always performed strongly in *Computeractive* antivirus tests, so we highly recommend it.

3 devices for 15 months NOW ONLY £9.99*

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Buy it from our Software Store at www.snipca.com/56927

*while stocks last

Reader Support

Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email **editor@computeractive.co.uk** and we'll do our best to help

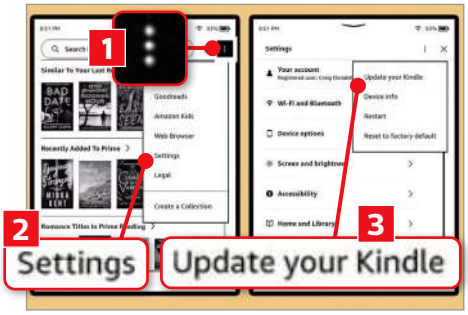
Has Amazon removed option to customise Kindle screensaver?

Q On page 56 of Issue 723's Cover Feature ('Ultimate hacks for Amazon') you explain how to customise a Kindle e-reader screensaver to show the book you're currently reading. You say to choose Settings then 'Screen and brightness'. I have the latest Kindle (12th Edition) but on my 'Screen and brightness' page there's no option to customise the screen. Has Amazon removed this?

George Chappell

A No, but perhaps you haven't updated your Kindle in a while. Amazon moved the option you want to the 'Screen and brightness' page in the 5.16.6 firmware update, released in early 2024. If you're running an earlier version of the Kindle software then you need to look in Settings, Device Options, then Display Cover. However, it makes more sense to update your Kindle to the latest software so the option does appear in the 'Screen and brightness' settings, and your device also receives other features added since.

To do this, connect your Kindle to Wi-Fi, then tap the three dots top right (1 in our screenshot below) followed by Settings 2 and select 'Update your Kindle' 3. If the option is greyed out, your device is already running the latest software. You can see Amazon's recent firmware updates at www.snipca.com/57229.



Update your Kindle to install the latest firmware releases

Bear in mind, though, that some Kindle users have said they still can't see the option even after installing 5.16.6. Their solution was to factory-reset their device, but this is a drastic move because it will delete all books and files you've added yourself, along with any personal settings.

Is PDFgear safe to download?

Q I was keen to try the new version of PDFgear (www.snipca.com/57092), as you recommended in Issue 724 (page 18). But when I tried to download it I saw a warning from a service called Darktrace Antigena. That name means nothing to me, so I'm totally baffled. Is PDFgear safe or not?

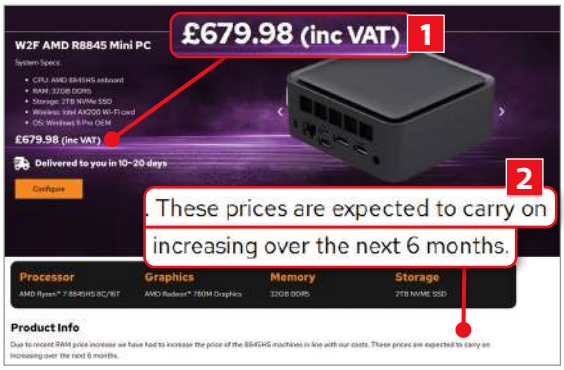
James Squire

A PDFgear is perfectly safe, so you can ignore the warning. However, we wonder if you tried to download it on a work computer? Darktrace Antigena is a business security system used by some companies to monitor and protect their networks. It's probably being a little over-cautious to shield the company from attack, which explains the warning. If you need to use PDFgear at work you should contact your IT department to allow it. Otherwise, try downloading it on your home PC. Your antivirus shouldn't flag it up as unsafe, but if it does you can be sure it's a false positive.

Why does Wired2Fire's mini PC now cost £80 more?

Q I like both Wired2Fire computers and mini PCs, so was delighted to read that the company had made one (AMD R8845, reviewed in Issue 723, page 22), and that at £600 it was within my budget – just! I waited for payday at the end of November to buy it, maybe hoping it would be cheaper as a result of Black Friday. But alas, the opposite – the price was now £679.98 (1 in our screenshot above). I'll have to wait an extra month before buying it. Did you get the price wrong?

Phil Gibbs



Surging memory costs have forced Wired2Fire to increase the price of its AMD R8845 mini PC

A No, the £600 price was correct, but unfortunately the increase to £680 is the first sign of big price rises in tech that are going to hit consumers next year. We spoke to Wired2Fire, which said the global storage of DRAM (Dynamic Random Access Memory) is to blame. This is extremely fast memory that's also being sought by AI companies to power their data centres, and this surging demand is driving up prices.

Unlike many PC manufacturers, Wired2Fire is upfront about the costs. It has added an explanation to the PC's listing 2, saying the price rises are "expected to carry on increasing over the next 6 months". It goes into more detail in its blog: www.snipca.com/57217.

However, even at this higher price we think the AMD R8845 is great value, and remains our favourite mini PC (see page 32). The price is likely to rise again soon, so consider buying it now if you can. We wrote about 2026's price rises and how to beat them in Issue 725, page 60 – buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/57216.

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

3K 2880x1620 pixels.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

ADSL A technology that converts a phone line into broadband.

Agentic Software that acts independently.

ALLM Auto Low Latency Mode. Makes gaming feel more responsive.

API key Unique code identifying and authorising a user or app.

ARM Processors that are more energy-efficient than those made by AMD and Intel.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen.

Bandwidth A measure of data through a connection at one time.

Benchmarking Comparing products with an accepted standard.

Beta Software that's being tested.

BIOS Software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Bitrate Data-transfer speed.

Bloatware Unwanted software built into a new device.

Bootable Describes a device that can be used to start up your PC.

Brute-force attack A method of breaking encryption by simply guessing all possible passwords.

Buffering Downloading data before starting to play a video.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

cd/m² Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot An AI program that recreates conversation with humans.

Client A program that acts as an interface between PC and server.

Clock speed The speed at which a processor can perform operations.

Code Written instructions that tell software how to execute tasks.

Command line A way to control a PC by typing instructions.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

Dark mode White text on black.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DDR4 The newest, fastest type of computer memory.

Distro A version of the Linux OS.

DLSS A graphics trick that boosts gaming using AI upscaling.

DNS A technology that associates PCs with their internet addresses.

Dolby Atmos Surround-sound tech that adds 'height' to audio.

Dolby Vision Dolby's HDR tech.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

E-Ink Special ink that displays content in electronic devices.

Efficiency core Processors used for background tasks.

Emoji A small graphic in a text.

eSIM A virtual SIM card.

Ethernet A standard used for wired computer networks.

Executable file A program file designed to run in Windows.

Factory reset Restoring a device to the manufacturer's default settings.

False positive Wrong detection of a malware infection.

Firmware Software stored on hardware to control its operation.

Fps Frames per second.

Frame rate Number of still images per second in a moving image.

Freemium Where basic services are provided for free, while more advanced features must be paid for.

FTTC Fibre-to-the-cabinet.

FTTP Fibre-to-the premises.

Full HD 1920x1080 pixels.

Geo-restricted Content restricted to a specific country or region.

Gesture Finger movements on a screen that perform an action.

GPU A chip that creates 3D graphics.

Graphics card Produces the image shown on a PC monitor.

HDMI Connection that transmits high-definition video and audio.

HDR Screen tech that improves the range of luminance between the darkest and brightest parts.

HDR10+ High-dynamic range 10. Current industry standard for TVs.

HEIC Apple's default image format.

HEIF Image format that uses compression.

Histogram Visual representation of an image's exposure.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens.

ICS A file format for calendars.

Image file A file containing all items on a CD, DVD or hard drive.

Incognito mode A browser mode that doesn't save your search history.

IP address Used to identify PCs and websites.

IP54 Provides limited protection from dust and water.

IPS A screen technology that has more accurate colours.

ISO file A type of image file.

JPEG A common type of image file created by digital cameras.

Layers Image-editing programs let users create multiple layers, which can be re-ordered or hidden.

LED Electronic device that emits light.

Liquid Retina Apple's term for its high-quality LCD screens.

M.2 A standard specification for PC expansion cards and connectors.

Macro Automated series of commands or options.

Macro lens Lets you take sharp, detailed, close-up photos.

Matter Open-source standard for smart-home devices.

Membrane keyboard Uses rubber domes to connect to electrical contacts.

Mesh Wi-Fi Uses multiple connected routers to stretch Wi-Fi.

MicroSD card Type of memory card.

MVNO Mobile virtual network operator.

NAS Network-attached storage.

Neural engine A chip part built specifically to speed up AI tasks.

NPU Specialised chip designed for performing AI tasks.

OCR Converts printed text into documents that can be edited.

OLED A thin-film light-emitting diode used in PC and TV screens.

ONT Installed at your home as part of a FTTP broadband service.

PCIe A faster version of PCI – a slot for expansion cards.

Performance core Processors for heavy-duty computer work.

Periscope zoom A camera design using mirrors to achieve higher optical zoom.

PNG Image format that uses compression without discarding data.

PPPoE A network protocol.

QLED Screen technology that boosts brightness and colour.

QR code A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM A computer's working area.

Raytracing Provides realistic lighting in an image.

Recovery code One-off backup code you use to sign in.

Refresh rate The number of times per second an image is redrawn.

Refurbished A device that has been repaired by its manufacturer.

Render How a website converts digital code into an image.

RGB keyboard Advanced type of LED backlit keyboard.

Sandbox A virtual container that you can run programs in safely.

Scissor switch Keys with two plastic pieces that interlock.

Script A program that is stored on a server to control part of a website.

SD card A type of memory card.

Sideload To install apps without using the official Android store.

SIM Smart card in mobile phones.

Software repository An online library where you download and update software safely.

Spatial audio Surround sound that envelops you from all directions.

Splitter Lets you stream video from a single source to multiple screens.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors.

SSD Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts.

Subwoofer A bass speaker.

System restore point Collection of system files to which Windows can revert if a problem occurs.

TF card Similar to a microSD card.

TFT A type of screen technology used in liquid LCDs.

Thunderbolt A very fast port.

Travel The distance keys have to be pressed to register a keystroke.

Tri-band A router that broadcasts on 2.4GHz, 5GHz and 6GHz.

Tweeter A high-frequency speaker.

UEFI Modern version of the BIOS.

Upscale Create a larger version of a photo without sacrificing detail.

USB-C Connector that's reversible.

VA A form of LCD with liquid crystals.

VDSL Broadband data-tansmission technology.

Vector graphics Graphics that can be enlarged without loss of quality.

Virtual memory Data that is moved from RAM to the hard drive.

VPN Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

Whitelist A list of safe websites, email addresses and programs.

Wi-Fi 5 A standard for wireless with higher transfer speeds than 802.11n.

Wi-Fi 6 10 times faster than Wi-Fi 5.

Wi-Fi 6E Wi-Fi 6 extended to include the 6GHz band.

Wi-Fi 7 Has an estimated maximum speed of around 46Gbps.

Wi-Fi card Adds Wi-Fi to a PC.

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

Zigbee Low-power wireless system connecting smart home devices.

Broadband Deals

	Provider	Package Name	Monthly Price	Contract Length	Broadband Speed	Reward*	First-year Cost*
1	vodafone	Full Fibre 150	£20.00 £23.50 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	150Mbps avg. speed	£50 Gift Card	CHEAPEST £218.00
2	Virgin media	M125	£18.99 £22.99 from April Bill 2026	24 Months	132Mbps avg. speed	N/a	£259.88
3	TalkTalk	Full Fibre 150	£24.00 £28.00 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	152Mbps avg. speed	£85 Gift Card	£235.00
4	youfibre	You2000	£34.99 No price rise	24 Months	1800Mbps avg. speed	N/a	£ 419.88

Go to www.snipca.com/55902 for full details

* Payments based on 12x monthly cost (including price rise) minus reward value
*Reward subject to change. Available as of 10 December 2025.

GO COMPARE

Easy when you

Know How

Hoping to plan his year ahead with a minimum of effort, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Add calendar events using AI

I'm always happy to receive a wall calendar for Christmas, and not just to cover the crack in my kitchen wall. Although I've lost the childhood excitement of flipping over a page to a new month and picture, it's still the best way to keep track of birthdays, medical appointments and other important events.

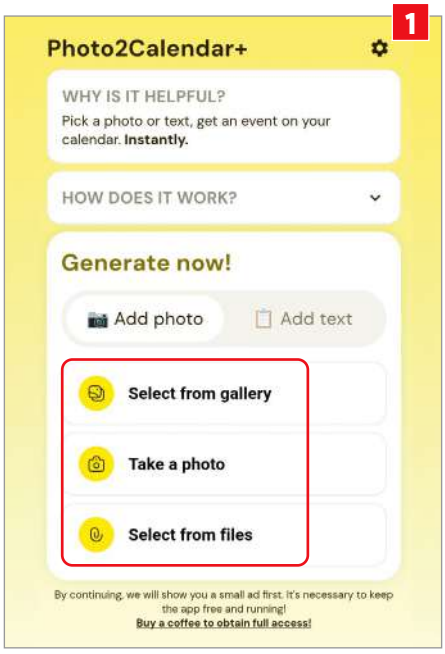
That may be why I've never fully embraced Google Calendar or other digital calendar services. I know they sync your schedule across devices, remind you about imminent events and make it easy to amend information without having to scribble it in biro, but they feel too much like work to be fun.

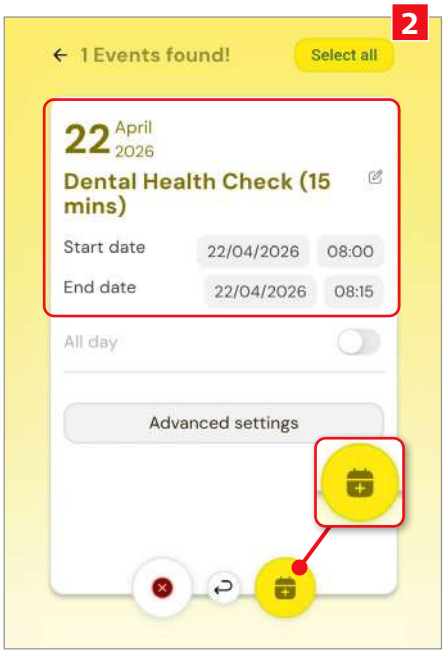
> It extracts event info from screenshots, photos and flyers

So I was intrigued to discover a new app called Photo2Calendar+, which takes the hassle out of adding events to your digital calendar. Rather than make you type everything manually, the app uses AI to extract event information from screenshots, photos and flyers. It then inserts the relevant details in your calendar.

This sounded ideal for my lazy needs, so I installed the free Photo2Calendar+ app for Android (www.snipca.com/57315) – it's also available for iOS (www.snipca.com/57316). Its simple yellow-and-white home screen presented me with three options – 'Select from gallery', 'Take a photo' and 'Select from files' (see screenshot 1) – and warned I'd be shown a 'small ad' by continuing.

I tapped the gallery option and selected a screenshot I'd taken of an email confirming a dental appointment in April. Photo2Calendar+ now prompted me to upgrade to its Premium version for 59p a month or a one-off purchase of £4.99. This promised faster and more accurate event detection, no adverts and the ability to export events as ICS files. But I wasn't prepared to pay anything until I knew it worked.


1
Photo2Calendar+
WHY IS IT HELPFUL?
Pick a photo or text, get an event on your calendar. Instantly.
HOW DOES IT WORK?
Generate now!
Add photo
Add text
Select from gallery
Take a photo
Select from files
By continuing, we will show you a small ad first. It's necessary to keep the app free and running!
Buy a coffee to obtain full access!



Robert used Photo2Calendar+ to extract details of his dental appointment from a screenshot

I dismissed the ad, granted Photo2Calendar+ access to my phone's Calendar app and was pleased to see its AI had extracted the correct information. This included the date, time and purpose of the event, and even the duration (see screenshot 2). I tapped the yellow 'Add to Calendar' button to save the details to my calendar.

That first attempt worked well, but how would the app cope with more complex extraction than my dental appointment (which is only a routine check-up)? To find out, I took a photo of a flyer for a musical festival, which contained lots of text other than the date.

After skipping that pesky upgrade nag, I saw the date and name of the event had been extracted but, as it was a three-day festival with four stages, Photo2Calendar+ had created 12 entries. I deleted the irrelevant ones and wondered why it hadn't detected the location, which was shown at the top of the flyer. Curiously, when I added the event to my calendar, the location *was* included, along with the organiser's website – it just wasn't shown on the 'Events found' screen.

Finally, I uploaded a PDF of a flight-booking confirmation. It detected the dates and times of the outward and return flights, without including irrelevant information, but again didn't show the locations (airports) until I added the event to my calendar.

That's an annoying flaw, but I like that you can set up reminders through the app and view a history of events you've created. It also lets you add them manually, though that sort of defeats the object.

I think Photo2Calendar+ will still save me a lot of time and typing in 2026. And I can probably stretch to 59p a month to remove its upgrade prompt.

Need help managing your calendars? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries to remove AI 'slop' from Google

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